

## **Executive - 11 February 2004**

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)  
Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Bryant, Cavill, Edwards, Garner, Hall and Mrs Lewin-Harris

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Mr J J Thornberry (Director of Corporate Resources), Mr P Weaver (Director of Community Services Acting), Ms S Adam (Head of Finance), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mr K Toller (Chief Personnel Officer), Ms K Dyson (Leisure Development Manager), Mr B Cleere (Community Initiatives Manager), Mrs H Tiso (Benefit Service Unit Manager), Mrs N Heal (Public Relations Officer), Mr C Brazier (Head of Housing), Mr M Western (Housing Manager – Private Sector and Development), Mr C Mulcahy (Assistant Manager – Horticultural), Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager) and Ms J Dickinson (Head of Commercial Services)

Also Present: Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Croad, Gill, Henley, Hindley, Lees, Lisgo, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith, Stuart-Thorn, Wedderkopp, and Weston

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm).

1. Apologies
2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 14 January 2004 were taken as read and were signed.

3. Review of Various Grant Schemes Administered by the Leisure Development Team

A report regarding the various grants administered by the Leisure Development Team had been submitted to the Health and Leisure Review Panel in November 2003. Two of the recommendations regarding the priority to be given to funding young people's facilities before children's play equipment and the level of play area grant awards had not been supported by the Panel and the matter had, therefore, been referred to the Executive for further consideration.

The Panel had felt that the recommendation made to reduce the capital grant for play equipment from 85% of the project cost to 33% was unacceptable and had requested that it should remain at its current rate. The Panel had also rejected the idea that priority should be given to funding young people's facilities over children's play equipment.

It was explained that external grant aid assistance could be available in certain circumstances for the funding of play areas. Also, in all other grant schemes operated by the Council, the Council was the funder of last resort with the bulk of funding coming from other sources.

There was significantly less provision for young people within Taunton Deane than there was for the under fives. If the grant scheme were refocused to give priority to applications for facilities for older children and young people, this would not only meet demand but also contribute to actions to avoid crime and balance out this inequality.

The application of a 33% maximum to capital grants for play areas and young people's provision would not only bring the awards in line with all other grant schemes but the fund would be able to support a greater number of schemes.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) priority be given to funding young people's facilities before children's play equipment;
- (2) play area grant awards be reduced to 33% of the project cost from the 85% currently awarded with effect from 2005/06.

(Councillors Paul and Stuart-Thorn both declared personal interests in this item).

#### 4. Management Issues in Vivary Park

Reported that a Management Plan had been developed for Vivary Park as a requirement of the grant received from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The work had prompted questions about the way in which parks were managed and Vivary Park had been taken as a pilot for investigating a more holistic regime driven by Corporate Priorities and community needs.

Details of the Management Plan and the Action Plan were submitted. Although the actions had arisen from the development of the Management Plan and a consideration of the issues identified from consultation, they had been grouped under the eight headings for assessment under the Green Flag Award scheme which were:

- a welcoming place;
- healthy, safe and secure;
- clean and well maintained;
- sustainability;
- conservation and heritage;
- community involvement;
- marketing; and
- management.

The Management Plan also proposed a Vision and Aims for the Park.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the Vision for Vivary Park as set out in the report be adopted;
- (2) the Aims for Vivary Park as set out in the report be adopted;
- (3) a review be agreed covering the arrangements governing the use of Vivary Park by stake holders to ensure they complied with current licence/lease arrangements, that they met the Borough's corporate objectives and its objectives for Parks and Green Spaces and that the financial arrangements particularly regarding income levels, be optimised;
- (4) consultation be agreed with the existing stake holders in the Park on the contents of their current leases and practices to ensure that they delivered the terms set out within the current arrangements and, where possible, delivered services to local people that met the objectives for the Park;
- (5) a review be agreed of the allocation of maintenance and management resources in order to create a greater degree of "conspicuous care" through a review of work measurement systems and the deployment of staff;
- (6) consideration be given to creating a managerial post with overall responsibility for all aspects of the management of the Parks service;
- (7) the examination of existing income streams in the Park be agreed, with a view to maximising the opportunities to create additional resources.

(Councillors Hall and Prior-Sankey both declared personal interests in this item).

#### 5. People Management Strategy

Submitted report which considered a People Management Strategy for the Council.

The People Management Strategy was a document intended to set out what sort of employer the Council wanted to be, how it wanted to manage it's staff and identify the key issues that needed to be addressed in order to achieve these things.

A draft strategy had been prepared and was submitted. This draft had been developed, alongside consultation with the staff and managers. It had also been considered and refined by the Resource Review Panel and the Corporate Management Team.

RESOLVED that the People Management Strategy, as submitted, be agreed.

6. Benefit Fraud Inspectorate/CPA Diagnostic Report

Reported that all District Councils were subject to a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). For those within Somerset, this would take place during 2004. In addition to the corporate self-assessment, the Council were also required to submit a self-assessment diagnostic to the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI). Details were reported of the self-assessments to be submitted to the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate. An update was also provided on the Council's compliance with Department for Working Pensions Performance Standards.

The BFI's assessment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit services would consider current performance and proven capacity to improve. It would be based on performance against the BFI/Department for Work and Pensions Performance Standards and would take account of Best Value Performance Indicators and other performance factors.

On 6 January 2004, the BFI had invited the Council to send a copy of its latest self-assessment against the performance standards and the Council's response to 53 questions. The Council had until 16 February 2004 to submit its response. Details of the response to the 53 questions was submitted. Also submitted, was a summary of the Units self-assessment against the Department for Work and Pensions Details of Performance Standards and information relating to the compliance against individual elements of the standards was set out in the report.

RESOLVED that the self-assessments in response to the key questions and the Department for Work and Pensions Performance Standards be agreed.

7. Corporate Strategy 2004 to 2007

Reported that the Corporate Strategy played an important role in setting clear priorities and ambitions for the Council. It gave a direction for future investment decisions and a basis for performance improvement across all services. A draft strategy had been prepared and was submitted for consideration.

Following extensive consultation the draft Strategy had also been considered by the Review Board at its meeting on 29 January 2004 and its comments had been taken into account in the final draft.

RESOLVED that the draft Corporate Strategy 2004 to 2007 be agreed.

8. Housing Revenue Account, Revenue Estimates and Rent Levels

Submitted report previously circulated which set out in detail the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2004/2005. It also included details relating to the new rent level service charges and other housing related

charges such as garage rents. It also provided information on the Deane Help Line Trading Account and Deane Building DLO Trading Account.

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

RESOLVED that Council be recommended that the Housing Revenue Account budget be agreed.

9. Housing Capital Programme 2004/2005 to 2006/2007

Submitted report which set out in detail a draft programme for 2005/2006 and 2006/ 2007 and the proposed Housing Capital Programme for 2004/2005. It included details of the resources available, as well as recommendations for how they should be allocated. Investment focussed on the three areas of maintaining and improving the Council housing stock to a Decent Home Standard, providing grants to registered social landlords to build new homes and providing grants to individual home owners to reduce levels of unfitness in private sector properties.

The report had been considered by both the Housing Review Panel and the Review Board and reflected the views of those meetings.

RESOLVED that the Council be recommended that the Housing Capital Programme 2004/2005 to 2006/2007 be agreed.

10. General Fund Revenue Estimates 2004/2005

Considered report previously circulated regarding the Executive's 2004/2005 budget proposals. The report contained details on:-

- (1) the General Fund Revenue Budget proposals for 2004/2005;
- (2) the results of the public consultation exercises;
- (3) draft figures on the expected financial position of the Council for the following two years;
- (4) Prudential Indicators for 2004/2005; and
- (5) an overview of the proposed increases in fees and charges for 2004/2005.

The report had been considered in detail by the Review Board and details of its views were submitted.

The 2003/2004 Budget Setting Report which was considered by Council in February 2003 required £692,000 of General Fund Reserves to support spending. This was to fund one-off items of expenditure such as a Revenue

Contribution to Capital (RCCO) and to fund some of the Priority 1 non-recurring development bids.

Work on the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan had started in the summer of 2003. The financial model was refined and updated to predict the Council's financial position over a three year period. The model showed quite clearly the predicted "budget gap" that had to be resolved for 2004/2005 and allowed the Executive to refine their financial strategy in the longer term.

As the year progressed and the financial picture became clearer, it was apparent that some difficult decisions would be required in this budget round. The model highlighted a budget gap which eventually settled at £1.381 m. The Executive Councillors proposals for closing the gap were issued for consultation to all Councillors and each political group. The Executive had subsequently been informed of any comments received.

The fundamental aim of the budget setting process was to present a budget for 2004/ 2005 that kept the Council's reserves at an acceptable level and the Council Tax increase at a minimum whilst continuing to deliver high quality, low cost services to the public. The difficult financial situation faced by the Council emphasised the importance of planning for the years ahead. Not only did the Council face the challenge of funding new services and meeting Government targets but were likely to face significant revenue funding problems in future years due to further increases in the employers' pension fund contribution. The Medium Term Financial Plan clearly indicated that this Council had an underlying budget problem. The Executive would consider a Financial Strategy that would help set a clear way forward and allow the Council to deliver a sustainable financial plan in the medium term.

The General Fund Revenue Account was the Council's main fund and showed the income and expenditure relating to the provision of services. Although the Council made charges for some of its services, much of the remaining expenditure was funded by the Government through the Revenues Support Grant and National Non-Domestic Rates. Any short fall was funded by the Council Tax payer.

This was the second year of the new amended grant system for the distribution of Local Government funding. In the final announcement on 29 January 2004, the Government had allocated £6.5 m of grant to Taunton Deane (compared to our actual grant received in 2003/2004 of £7.037 m). The Government had retained the new formula for assessing the needs of each Authority. District Councils nationally had received a minimum grant increase of 3%. However, changes to the funding of Housing Benefit had impacted on the total grant receivable by this Council for 2004/ 2005. In total, the Government's contribution towards this Council's spending requirement had risen by only £101,000 (1.44%) for the next year.

The final settlement figures included in the budget proposals had now been received and were reflected in the report. The proposed budget for Taunton Deane would result in a Band D Council Tax of £116.63, an increase of £7.12

(6.5%) on 2003/ 2004. The estimated expenses chargeable to the non-parished area of Taunton in 2004/2005 amounted to £25,750, an increase of 3% and this formed part of the total net expenditure of the Council. This year, for the first time, detailed budgets had been produced for the Deane DLO. The DLO were forecasted to make a surplus of £82,000 in 2004/2005. The Leisure DSO had prepared budgets for 2004/2005 and these reflected the recent decision to defer the formation of the Leisure Trust. The expected level of deficit funding required was £699,000.

As part of the Prudential Code for Capital Finance, there was a requirement for Council to approve the indicators which were set out in the report. These included the borrowing limits which were previously detailed in the separate report to the Executive.

It was also now a requirement of the Council to prepare, not only budgets for the following financial year, but also provide indicative figures for the two years after that. The Medium Term Financial Plan provided an indication of the expected budget gap going forward into 2005/2006 and this was shown in the report.

The Local Government Act 2003 imposed a new duty on the Council's Section 151 Officer (Head of Finance) to comment as part of the budget setting process upon the robustness of the budget and adequacy of reserves. The Head of Finance had thoroughly reviewed the procedures, outputs and outcomes of the budget setting process and felt that the Council's reserves were adequate and the budget estimates used in preparing the 2004/2005 budget sufficiently robust.

RESOLVED that the Council be recommended that the budget for general funds services for 2004/2005, as outlined in the report, be agreed and that:-

- (a) the transfer for any underspend in 2003/2004 back to General Fund Reserves be agreed;
- (b) the use of £16,523 from General Fund Reserves to support the 2004/2005 budget be agreed;
- (c) the development bids outlined in the report be agreed;
- (d) the increases to fees and charges set out in the report be agreed;
- (e) the proposed 2004/2005 budget being Authority expenditure of £10,975,203 and Special Expenses of £25,750, be agreed in accordance with the Local Government Act 1992;
- (f) the predicted General Fund Reserve balance at 31 March 2005 of £1,310,466 be noted; and
- (g) the Prudential Indicators for 2004/2005, as set out in the report, be agreed.

11. General Fund Capital Programme 2004/2005 to 2006/2007

Considered report previously circulated regarding the proposed General Fund Capital Programme for the period 2003/2004 to 2006/2007. The estimated resources available for this period amounted to £7,764,102. The proposed capital programme amounted to £6,383,046, leaving £1,381,056 of unallocated capital resources available for future schemes.

All capital expenditure had to be financed from borrowing, capital receipts or other revenue funds. After taking into account the current programme which was already approved and financed, the anticipated available surplus resources for the period 2003/2004 to 2006/2007 were £175,000 of Capital Receipts and £1,813,356 of unallocated Capital Reserve, making a total of £1,988,356.

In previous years, the Council's resources took into consideration the use of Credit Approvals. With effect from 1 April 2004, a new system called the Prudential Code would come into effect which gave Local Authorities the freedom to borrow providing the borrowing was affordable, prudent and sustainable. The sources of finance did not anticipate that the Council would take advantage of its new freedom to borrow. Any new loan debt would only be taken after full consideration of the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy and the indicators prescribed by the Prudential Code.

The Capital Receipts of £175,000 represented income that was expected to be generated from the sale of assets. This income could be wholly reinvested in funding capital schemes.

The current approved capital programme totalled £5,483,621. This included any slippage in schemes that had been rolled forward from 2002/2003 and any subsequent Supplementary Estimates that had been approved by Council.

The budget consultation packs previously issued to all Councillors detailed new schemes which had been both accepted and rejected by the Executive. The Review Board had considered the Capital Programme at its meeting on 29 January 2004 and made no suggestions for changes to the proposed budget.

Since the consideration of the programme to the Review Board, Executive Councillors had revisited the proposed programme and suggested one further addition. The scheme for continued financial support in 2004/2005 for improvements to the Taunton Canal/River Corridor (£10,000) was now included in the draft programme.

Details were also submitted of capital projects where it was proposed not to allocate funds in the current programme.

It was noted that a future contribution to the Silk Mills scheme had not been ruled out but that further details would be required.



The detailed General Fund Capital Programme, which included these proposed schemes, now totalled £6,383,046.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended that the General Fund Capital Programme as set out in the report be agreed.

(Councillor Prior-Sankey, as a County Councillor, declared a personal interest in the Silk Mills scheme).

## 12. Council Tax Setting 2004/2005

Submitted report which made recommendations to the Council on the proposed level of Council Tax for 2004/2005.

The Council was required to make an annual determination which set its gross expenditure (including the Housing Revenue Account and balances brought forward) and gross income (also included in the housing revenue account and balances brought forward) with the difference as its budget requirement. (This determination is set out in the resolution).

The estimated expenses chargeable to the non-parished area of Taunton in 2004/2005 amounted to £25,750 and this formed part of the total net expenditure of the Council. Details were also submitted of the parish precepts levied and the appropriate Council Tax at Band D.

The estimated balance on the Council Tax Collection Fund was a deficit of £78,043. Taunton Deane's share of this amounted to £8,435. This was reflected in the revenue estimates.

The overall debt outstanding on Community Charge was now approximately £140. The overall debt had been reduced during the year by write-offs of over £1000 and it was estimated that the Community Charge Collection Fund as at 15 January 2004 had a deficit of £27,217. This element was not shared with the County Council or the Police Authority and was, therefore, a cost for the General Fund. This was reflected in the revenue estimates.

The Council's budget requirement including parish precepts and non-parished special expenses was £11,306,166. This was then reduced by the amount notified in respect of the Borough's Revenue Support Grant of £3,675,969 and the non-domestic rates distribution from the pool amounting to £2,824,141.

The net amount having taken the collection fund position into account of £4,841,708 was used to calculate the Council Tax at Band D, reflecting the parish precepts, etc by dividing it by the total of the Council Tax Base as approved by the Executive in January 2004.

The Council Tax for the Borough (excluding parish precepts and special expenses for the non-parished area) was £116.63, an increase of £7.12 (6.5%) compared to the 2003/2004 Council Tax. The total Council Tax

including the County Council and Police Authority precept was still subject to confirmation.

RESOLVED that the Council be recommended that, subject to final determination, including the Council Tax for Somerset County Council and the Police Authority, which was still to be advised:

1. that it be noted that at its meeting on 14 January 2004 the Executive calculated the following amounts for the year 2004/05 in accordance with the regulations made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended):-

(a) 38,675.69 being the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as its Council Tax base for the year.

(b)

Ash Priors	66.24	Neroche	241.04
Ashbrittle	68.72	North Curry	684.85
Bathealton	84.19	Norton Fitzwarren	657.25
Bishops Hull	1,070.16	Nynehead	147.57
Bishops Lydeard/ Cothelstone	1,822.78	Oake	317.62
Bradford on Tone	276.96	Otterford	163.25
Burrowbridge	203.81	Pitminster	444.97
Cheddon Fitzpaine	626.00	Ruishton/ Thornfalcon	606.84
Chipstable	113.17	Sampford Arundel	128.78
Churchstanton	307.45	Staplegrove	715.61
Combe Florey	110.46	Stawley	116.69
Comeytrowe	2,066.03	Stoke St Gregory	374.36
Corfe	131.93	Stoke St Mary	192.98
Creech St Michael	934.29	Taunton	15,417.20
Durston	57.56	Trull	938.40
Fitzhead	118.96	Wellington	4,509.10
Halse	145.65	Wellington (Without)	292.30
Hatch Beauchamp	244.08	West Bagborough	153.99
Kingston St Mary	432.85	West Buckland	398.46
Langford Budville	213.97	West Hatch	139.68
Lydeard St			

Lawrence/Tolland	193.38	West Monkton	1,073.39
Milverton	573.00	Wiveliscombe	1,081.75

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

2. That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2004/05 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-

- (a) £50,521,900 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2)(a) of the Act.  
*(Gross Expenditure including amount required for working balance).*
- (b) £39,215,734 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3)(a) to (c) of the Act.  
*(Gross Income including reserves to be used to meet Gross Expenditure).*
- (c) £11,306,166 being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year.
- (d) £6,464,458 being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its general fund in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates, revenue support grant, additional grant or SSA reduction grant (increased by the amount of the sums which the Council estimates will be transferred in the year from its Collection Fund to its General Fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (*Council Tax Surplus*) and increased by the amount of any sum which the Council estimates will be transferred from its Collection Fund to its General Fund pursuant to the Collection Fund (Community Charge) directions under Section 98(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 made on 7 February 1994 (*Community Charge Surplus*).

(e)	£125.19	(c) - (d) + 11,306,166 – 6,464,458				
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being the amount calculated at (c) above less the amount at (d) above, all divided by the amount at .1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.

*(Average Council Tax at Band D for Borough Including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses).*

(f)	£330.963	being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act. <i>(Parish Precepts and Special Expenses).</i>
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(g)	£116.63	(e) - (f) = 125.19 - 330,963				
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being the amount at (e) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (f) above by the amount at 1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special items relate.

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

(h)

Ash Priors	120.40	Neroche	131.15
Ashbrittle	122.40	North Curry	133.42
Bathealton	123.76	Norton Fitzwarren	136.65
Bishops Hull	129.30	Nynehead	130.18
Bishops Lydeard/ Cothelstone	129.80	Oake	126.70
Bradford on Tone	131.07	Otterford	116.63
Burrowbridge	138.37	Pitminster	125.39

Cheddon Fitzpaine	124.62	Ruishton/ Thornfalcon	132.86
Chipstable	132.54	Sampford Arundel	151.11
Churchstanton	139.02	Staplegrove	127.39
Combe Florey	127.04	Stawley	125.20
Comeytrowe	123.89	Stoke St Gregory	132.66
Corfe	126.10	Stoke St Mary	125.96
Creech St Michael	131.52	Taunton	118.30
Durston	117.32	Trull	124.09
Fitzhead	130.92	Wellington	133.13
Halse	128.65	Wellington (Without)	128.60
Hatch Beauchamp	128.10	West Bagborough	129.62
Kingston St Mary	130.49	West Buckland	135.45
Langford Budville	124.34	West Hatch	130.50
Lydeard St Lawrence/Tolland	124.65	West Monkton	126.88
Milverton	127.10	Wiveliscombe	131.42

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

*(Council Taxes at Band D for Borough Parish*

- (i) See overleaf

14. Annual Investments Strategy

Reported that recent legislation required each Local Authority to produce an annual investments strategy.

In summary, the strategy required that:-

- all Council investments must be made with prime consideration being given to security of capital and liquidity of those investments;
- security was enhanced by use of credit ratings;
- investments were limited on amounts and time to ensure that the Council could honour cash commitments and benefit from positive interest rate movements;
- advantage of favourable moves in the interest rates should be taken by conducting forward deals supported by advice from specialist advisers;
- external fund management was deemed not appropriate at this time; and
- the Executive would be updated on any proposed changes/amendments to the strategy at future meetings and be presented with an end of year assessment included in the annual Treasury Management Outturn report.

The Annual Investment Strategy stated which investments the Council may use for the prudent management of its treasury balances during the financial year under the heads of specified investments and non-specified investments. These were listed in the appendix to the report.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended that the Investments Strategy, as submitted, be agreed.

14. Results of Third Quarter Budget Monitoring Exercise

Submitted report which gave a summary of the expected outturn position on General Fund and HRA Revenue and Capital budgets, following the third quarter budget monitoring exercise.

The forecast outturn figures for General Fund Revenue predicted a net underspend of 0.21% or £32,217 against the current approved budget.

The forecast outturn figures for HRA predicted a surplus of £166,570 against the current approved budget.

RESOLVED that the Council be recommended that the variations to the budget be agreed and the finance available be allocated as follows:-

£5,000	Golf Course flooding
£2,000	Golf Course Tree Pruning
£10,000	Car Park Signs
£4,000	Hunts Court – pump priming
£5,000	Chewing Gum Clearing Initiatives
£8,217	Pay on foot – feasibility study

**Total            £32,217**

(Councillor Mrs Bryant left the meeting at 8.30p.m.)

(The meeting ended at 9.35 pm).