

# Taunton Deane Borough Council

## Council Meeting – 15 May 2013

To receive the following recommendations from the Executive:-

### (i) Councillor Norman Cavill

#### Asset Strategy Project Funding

Central Government have provided a clear direction to local authorities to make better use of property assets in order to minimise Council Tax increases and protect services.

In January 2013, the Executive formally adopted a new Asset Management Plan (AMP). At the time it was understood that the AMP was a relatively low level plan, which largely set out the approach to our existing property assets.

Consequently the adoption of the AMP was subject to a more detailed and strategic review of our approach to asset management being undertaken following the agreement of the Corporate Business Plan.

The Business Plan recognises that to achieve this objective we need to bring in specialist external expertise to assist the Council in developing a new Asset Strategy.

The objective of the review is to develop a new Asset Strategy, which maximises the return from our assets (both financially and in terms of delivering Taunton Deane's Corporate Objectives) and which provides a clear decision making framework for future property asset decisions.

Specifically the new Asset Management Strategy and decision making framework will:-

- i) Ensure the Council makes best use of its property assets to deliver the Corporate Objectives and to help deliver financial sustainability;
- ii) Clearly articulate the balance between financial return and wider objectives;
- iii) Clearly reflect the Council's appetite for risk and reward; and
- iv) Provide a clear framework for future decisions about acquisitions and disposals, with appropriate levels of delegations regarding decisions.

Once developed and agreed by Members the new Asset Strategy and decision making framework will be applied to our existing and future assets by the Property Service.

The new Asset Strategy will encompass Taunton Deane's approach to all of our non-housing property assets. Clearly this project will overlap with and will need to

support and inform other projects such as the Accommodation and Customer Access Project (referred to in recommendation (iii) below).

Once the external expert is appointed, the strategy development work will then commence. It is not anticipated this will take a significant amount of time (as this is about developing a strategy and is not a detailed asset review). In fact, it is likely that between 20 and 30 days of external consultancy will be required at a potential cost of £40,000, although efforts would be made to minimise the cost involved.

The strategy development work will include the review of our current AMP and Corporate Business Plan and will also involve input from Members, the Corporate Management Team and the Property Service.

A draft strategy and decision making framework (or options for different strategies and frameworks) will then be brought to Members through the normal Scrutiny, Executive and Full Council process for agreement. The draft strategy and decision making framework will include details of the impact on our current property portfolio if it were to be adopted.

It is hoped the new Asset Strategy will be ready for adoption in October 2013.

Once agreed the new strategy will inform the AMP and be applied to our existing and future assets by the Property Service.

As Members will have seen from the edition of the Weekly Bulletin issued on 2 May 2013, I am supporting this proposal and therefore **recommend** that:-

- (1) £40,000 be allocated from the General Fund Reserve to fund the procurement of external expertise to enable a new Asset Strategy to be developed; and
- (2) It be noted that costs will be minimised wherever possible and any under spend will be returned to the General Fund Reserve.

## **(ii) Councillor Mark Edwards**

### **Introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy in Taunton Deane – Declaration under Section 212(4) of the Planning Act 2008**

When the Council submits its Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule for Examination it must be accompanied by a Declaration that:-

- (a) It has complied with the requirements of Section 212(4) of the Planning Act 2008 and CIL Regulations (including the requirements to have regard to the matters listed in Sections 211(2) and (4));
- (b) The charging authority has used appropriate available evidence to inform the draft Charging Schedule, and
- (c) Deals with any other matters prescribed by CIL Regulations.

This Declaration is set out in full in the attached Appendix.

As Members will have seen from the edition of the Weekly Bulletin issued on 2 May 2013, I am supporting this proposal and therefore **recommend** that the Council approves the Declaration under Section 212(4) of the Planning Act 2008.

### **(iii) Councillor Mrs Vivienne Stock-Williams**

#### **Council Accommodation and Customer Access Project – Project Mandate**

One of the recommendations contained in the report considered by the Executive last year in connection with The Deane House Accommodation Project was to look comprehensively at the Council's future accommodation needs in the light of the priorities identified in the Corporate Business Plan (CBP).

A mandate to undertake this review, which would also need to take into account access to services, was now required.

The latest Customer Access Strategy was approved in 2005 as part of the Southwest One project. This needed to be revisited and updated in the light of both social and technological changes and the Council's changing role.

Other Councils are very much in the same position and are, or have, re-considered their approach to accommodation (with a view to reducing their overheads) and their customer access. In Somerset there are several Councils, including the County Council, who have implemented "smart office" standards to release space which can then be let out to other organisations.

In the current economic climate it is important for the Council to consider its overhead costs and seek to reduce these. The recent report about the opportunity to share The Deane House with the Police showed that the investment required to bring the building up to modern day standards outweighed the financial return that the Council was likely to receive from rental income sharing with only one other organisation.

However, some of this investment will be required for any option that retains The Deane House as an office base. As such, it is proposed to commission a full condition survey of The Deane House as part of this project so that the true costs of continuing within this building are understood.

It is appropriate that the Council considers all the options available to it for the future. The scope of the project will therefore include:-

- To remain as sole / key occupier at The Deane House;
- To review the business case for making changes to The Deane House in order to make it fit for purpose for sharing with other partners;
- Joining a public sector hub at another location;
- Moving as sole occupier to another location;

- Dispersing the Council to a number of locations within the community; and
- To review all customer access channels: web, physical premises, telephone, social media;

All of these will have impact (both positive and negative) on the communities the Council serves and each will need to be assessed as to this impact.

The fundamental outputs from this project must be:-

- (1) A Business Case to provide flexible office accommodation for staff and Members which reduces our overhead costs; and
- (2) A Business Case to provide customer access to Taunton Deane services that is cost effective for the Council and best meets the future needs of its customers.

The Key Assumptions that will need to be considered are:-

- Any option will include looking at different ways of working;
- Any option will include solutions for travel / parking arrangements;
- The accommodation solution will be cheaper than the current provision;
- The accommodation solution will always comply with minimum standards laid down in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992;
- Not all staff will have a permanent desk;
- Customer access arrangements will cost no more than currently on an ongoing basis.

It is important for the Council to undertake this work in the near future to ensure that:-

- The Council has customer access that is fit for purpose;
- To drive down costs;
- To make the most of the Council's resources;
- To enable decisions on investment priorities; and
- To ensure that any opportunities to share overheads are not missed.

The project will require project management resource above the day to day work of the Council plus funding to employ external expertise in the areas of property advice and advice on the possibilities of updating the way Taunton Deane works and the Council's interaction with customers, including new technologies.

Such funding – estimated in the region of £70,000 – will pay for the external expertise as well as a Project Manager to work three days a week on this project for up to a nine month period plus some dedicated administrative support for two days a week. Any monies not used will be returned to the General Fund at the end of the project.

The timescales for reporting on this project are as follows:-

- Commission project - May 2013;

- Project Team set up - May 2013;
- First draft of options - October 2013;
- Business case for both accommodation and customer access to Scrutiny October / November 2013;
- Full Council decision - December 2013.

This topic was discussed at the meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee on 2 April 2013. Although the recommendations were supported, concerns were raised on the following issues:-

- Consideration should be given to ensuring the Council continues to serve those who do not wish or are unable to use self help mechanisms;
- That the true value of our assets is established; and
- That Members are involved with the project and that the Portfolio Holders for Asset Management are included in the governance arrangements.

The first two of these points are fundamental to the project and will be covered within the work that is commissioned. Members will be involved on a regular basis via both formal and informal briefings. In addition, regular progress reports can be scheduled to be brought to the Community Scrutiny Committee prior to any final report being drafted.

As Members will have seen from the edition of the Weekly Bulletin issued on 18 April 2013, I am supporting this proposal and therefore **recommend** that:-

- (1) The Council's Accommodation and Customer Access Project is mandated by Members; and
- (2) £70,000 be allocated from General Fund Reserves to fund the costs of the project, recognising that costs will be minimised wherever possible and any under spend returned to the General Fund.

## Appendix

| <b>Compliance with the Requirements of the Planning Act 2008</b> |   |
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| Section 211  | <p>In preparing the Draft Charging Schedule Taunton Deane Borough Council has had regard to the actual and expected costs of infrastructure; the economic viability of development; other actual or expected sources of funding for infrastructure; the actual or expected administrative expenses in connection with CIL; and the Statutory Guidance.</p> <p>Taunton Deane Borough Council has consulted a range of stakeholders in preparing the Draft Charging Schedule, with consultations taking place as follows:</p> <p>Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule: 29 June 2012 to 27 July 2012</p> <p>Draft Charging Schedule: 1 February 2013 to 15 March 2013</p> |
| Section 212  | <p>Taunton Deane Borough Council has appointed the Planning Inspectorate to examine the Draft Charging Schedule, as an appropriate independent body that has suitable qualifications and experience for the task. All persons who have submitted representations about the Draft Charging Schedule have been given the opportunity to be heard by the Examiner.</p>   |
| Section 212  | <p>The following appropriate, available evidence has informed the Draft Charging Schedule:</p> <p>Taunton Deane Borough Council Infrastructure Delivery Plan June 2011</p> <p>Taunton Deane Borough Council Community Infrastructure Levy Viability Appraisal May 2012</p> <p>PDCS Summary of Consultation Responses January 2013</p> <p>Taunton Deane Core Strategy September 2012</p>   |
| <b>Regulation No.</b>  | <b>Compliance with the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations, 2010 as amended by the CIL Regulations 2011</b>   |
| 12   | <p>The Draft Charging Schedule contains the information required by the Regulations, namely (a) the name of the charging authority; (b) the rates (in pounds per square metre) at which CIL is to be chargeable in the authority's area; (c) the location and boundaries of the zones for differential rates, on an Ordnance Survey base showing grid lines and references; and (d) an explanation of how the chargeable amount will be calculated.</p>   |
| 13   | <p>Taunton Deane Borough Council's differential Levy rates are compliant with Regulation 13, which enables charging authorities to set differential rates (including nil rates) by location and type of development.</p>  |

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| 14 | <p>In setting its differential Levy rates, Taunton Deane Borough Council has complied with Regulation 14(1), which requires that it ‘...must aim to strike what appears to the charging authority to be an appropriate balance between (a) the desirability of funding from CIL (in whole or in part) the actual and expected estimated total cost of infrastructure required to support the development of its area, taking into account other actual and expected sources of funding; and (b) the potential effects (taken as a whole) of the imposition of CIL on the economic viability of development across its area.’</p>   |
| 15 | <p>A Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule was approved on 20 June 2012 and published on 29 June, together with the accompanying evidence base. Consultation occurred in accordance with the Regulations over the period from 29 June 2012 to 27 July 2012 with the prescribed consultation bodies. Comments were also invited from residents, businesses and voluntary bodies, including:-</p> <p>All parties on the LDF consultation database;<br/>The public – a press release was issued, a press advertisement published and a copy of the Preliminary Draft (and supporting documents) was made available at the Borough Council’s offices and on the Council’s website.</p> <p>25 responses were received on the Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule (PDCS). These informed the preparation of the Draft Charging Schedule, and were reported to Taunton Deane Borough Council’s Executive on 16 January 2013. Full details are contained in the CIL PDCS Consultation Responses, available on the Council’s website.</p> |
| 16 | <p>In accordance with the Regulations, the Draft Charging Schedule was published, together with relevant evidence and Representations Procedure on the Council’s website on 1 February 2013. The webpage stated that the documents could be inspected at The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton. Copies were sent to each of the prescribed consultation bodies.</p> <p>In addition, all previous respondents on the Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule and consultees on the LDF Consultation database were notified of the publication of the Draft Charging Schedule.</p> <p>A local advertisement notice was placed in the Somerset County Gazette and the Wellington Weekly News.</p> <p>25 representations on the Draft Charging Schedule were received.</p> <p>All those making representations will be informed of each subsequent stage in the examination and adoption process, including submission, publication of the Examiner’s report and approval of the charging schedule by the charging authority.</p>   |
| 17 | <p>The period for representations on the Draft Charging Schedule was 1 February to 15 March 2013.</p>  |

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| 19 | <p>Taunton Deane Borough Council will submit this Declaration and the following to the examiner in accordance with the Regulations: (a) the Draft Charging Schedule; (b) a summary of the main issues raised by the representations; (c) copies of the representations; (d) any modifications; (e) copies of the relevant evidence.</p> <p>Copies of the above documents will be made available at the Council's offices as required by the Regulations. All documents will be available on the Council's website and a statement of the fact that the documents are available for inspection and where they can be inspected will be published.</p> <p>Any modifications to the Draft Charging Schedule will be published on the Council's website and notified to all prescribed consultation bodies as required by the Regulations.</p> |