

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 11 August 2009 at 7.17 pm.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Bowrah)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Beaven, Bishop, Brooks, Coles, Critchard, Denington, D Durdan, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gaines, Guerrier, Hayward, Henley, Miss James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, McMahon, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Murphy, O'Brien, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stuart-Thorn, Watson, Ms Webber, A Wedderkopp, D Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh and Mrs Wilson.

1. Apologies

The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Horsley) and Councillors Cavill, Ms Durdan, Edwards, Govier, Ms Herbert, C Hill, House, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Slattery, Stone, Thorne, Mrs Waymouth, Williams and Woolley.

2. Communications

The Mayor announced that Mr Charles Crowley, The Mayor of Taunton, Massachusetts, USA had paid a two day unofficial visit to Taunton Deane on 7 and 8 August 2009. He had been able visit a number of venues in the area including the Flower Show and had greatly appreciated the welcome afforded to him.

Councillor Meikle reminded Councillors of the Brewhouse Young Company's production of "Romeo and Juliet" which was being staged at the theatre on Thursday, 20 August 2009. He hoped as many Councillors as possible would attend this performance.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Brooks, Henley, McMahon, Paul, Prior-Sankey and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Mullins declared a personal interest as a Member of the Somerset Waste Board. Councillor Coles declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Miss James declared a personal interest as an employee of Viridor. Councillor Mrs Smith declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor Morrell declared a personal interest as the owner of leasehold properties. Councillors Brooks and Stuart-Thorn declared personal interests as Council tenants.

4. Rent Increase Decrease

The Executive had given detailed consideration as to whether to reduce the rent increase of 6.2% for Council tenants which was agreed by Full Council earlier in the year, to a local average of 2.95%.

Shortly after the Council had set its budget, the Government made a surprise announcement which sought to enable Councils to reduce their rent to a national average of 3.1%.

The Government had indicated that it would fund the reduction in the rent increase by increasing the Council's subsidy. In practice this meant the Council would pay less in Negative Subsidy.

The average rent for a Taunton Deane Tenant had been set at £63.96, but this would reduce to £62.10 if the rental increase was reduced.

There would be no significant impact on service or investment because the loss in income would be compensated through the subsidy determination. However, there would be additional IT and administrative costs, estimated at £15,000, which would slightly reduce the Housing Revenue Account Working Balance.

On the motion of Councillor Prior-Sankey, it was

Resolved that the rent increase agreed by Full Council on 17 February 2009, be reduced to a local average of 2.95%.

5. **Tenant Empowerment in Taunton Deane**

The Executive had also given detailed consideration to proposals to increase tenant empowerment in Taunton Deane.

During the past year, a small group of tenants had examined the opportunities available for tenants to have more say in the way in which their homes were managed. Following a series of meetings, a report had been prepared titled "Tenant empowerment in Taunton Deane : Next steps".

This Report provided an opportunity for the Council to make a significant difference by taking Tenant involvement to a level not seen before in Taunton Deane. It suggested the creation of a Tenant Service Management Board of ten tenant representatives and two Councillors, one from each of the main parties. The Board would be non-political and charged with the responsibility for ensuring the best possible standards of service delivery to tenants.

The Board would also have a key role in self-assessment of the landlord service against the new standards and regulatory framework being developed by the Tenant Services Authority.

To progress the work involved in the creation of a Tenant Services Management Board, it would be necessary to employ a specialist officer on a temporary basis.

On the motion of Councillor Prior-Sankey it was

Resolved that a supplementary estimate of £20,000 from the Housing Revenue Reserves be approved to enable the appointment of a temporary consultant Tenant Empowerment Officer.

(The meeting ended at 7.28 pm.)