

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 2 October 2012 at 6.30 pm.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Hall)
Councillors Mrs Adkins, Mrs Allgrove, Mrs Baker, Beaven, Bishop, Bowrah, Brooks, Cavill, Coles, Denington, Ms Durdan, Edwards, Farbahi, Gaines, A Govier, Mrs Govier, Hayward, Henley, Mrs Herbert, C Hill, Mrs Hill, Horsley, Hunt, Miss James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, Mrs Messenger, Morrell, Mullins, Nottrodt, Ms Palmer, Prior-Sankey, D Reed, Mrs Reed, Ross, Gill Slattery, T Slattery, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Swaine, Tooze, Mrs Warmington, Watson, Mrs Waymouth, A Wedderkopp, D Wedderkopp, Williams and Wren

(Councillors Henley and Wren arrived at the meeting at 7.19 p.m. and 7.35 p.m. respectively.)

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 17 July 2012, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. **Apologies**

The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Ms Lisgo) and Councillors D Durdan, Mrs Floyd, Meikle and Ms Webber.

3. **Declaration of Interests**

Councillors Brooks, A Govier, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Waymouth and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Mrs Hill and Mrs Smith declared personal interests as employees of Somerset County Council. Councillor Wren declared personal interests as an employee of Natural England and as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. Councillors Hayward declared a personal interest as one of the Council's representatives on the Somerset Waste Board. Councillor Nottrodt declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Tooze declared a personal interest as an employee of the UK Hydrographic Office. Councillor Swaine, declared a personal interest as a part-time swimming instructor. Councillor Mullins declared a personal interest as EDF Energy at Hinkley Point was his employer. Gill Slattery declared personal interests as a member of the Board of Governors at Somerset College. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as a local owner of land in Taunton Deane.

4. **Public Question Time**

Mr Peter Venn, the Manager of the RSPCA's West Hatch Wildlife Centre at West Hatch, stated that in his view the proposed Badger Cull would not result

in a reduction in cases of Bovine Tuberculosis (TB). In fact, culling could result in the overall situation becoming worse through something called 'perturbation'.

Mr Venn explained that Badgers usually lived in stable setts in small communities. Mixing between setts was very limited. However, if the setts were disturbed by culling, any survivors were likely to escape from the immediate area which could easily increase the rate of transfer of TB between animals rather than retaining it within a particular sett.

Rather than risk the spread of TB through proposed shooting, Mr Venn recommended that the suggested programme of vaccination should be pursued by the Government. Mr David Couper agreed with Mr Venn's views and both asked for the Council's support in this matter.

Mr Paul Partington asked the following questions:-

- (1) The Swimming Provision in Taunton Deane Task and Finish Group gave careful consideration to the replacement of St James Street Pools and the refurbishment of Station Road Pool. I recognize that St James Pools are coming to the end of their lives and was pleased to see the recommendations for building a new swimming pool at the Blackbrook Pavilion Sports Centre.

What does not appear to be clear in item 9 on the agenda is the detail of refurbishment of Station Road Pool. There has been much encouragement through the recent Olympics for young people to take up sport. There is a lack of thirty three and a third metre pools and deep water in the south west. Station Road is the only pool in Taunton Deane to provide these facilities.

I hope that the refurbishment of Station Road Pool will mean that the existing length of thirty three and a third metres will remain as a single pool. Also the deep water would remain for those wanting to practice and train synchronized swimming. To give an analogy, to change the existing facility would be like replacing a cricket pitch with a football pitch at a financial cost to the tax payer.

Please could I have some clarity as to what the refurbishment works at Station Road will be?

In response, Councillor Mrs Herbert stated that a Condition Survey of the Station Road Pool was being undertaken which would enable the Council and Tone Leisure to assess what works needed to be carried out. There was the possibility of a bid being made to Sport England for funding towards any works needed to the swimming pool.

Councillor Mrs Herbert added that no changes to the size or depth of the pool were planned and that she would be happy to meet with Paul Partington to discuss the issue in greater detail.

- (2) Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that if there are no Christmas lights on the main streets of Taunton Town Centre this year, this would be a public relations disaster for the long term growth prospects of our district? Could he or the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth explain how this is likely to come about and what steps is he taking to make good this deficiency?

Does he agree with me that this will be sending out the wrong message at the wrong time? Does he appreciate that this kind of failure will diminish the long term prospects of developing Taunton's Town Centre?

Will he immediately begin to review the role of the Town Centre Company and the annual subsidy which we provide when they are not fulfilling our Vision for the town? What Service Level Agreement exists between us and the Town Centre Company and did it include the provision of Christmas Lights – and if not, why not?

BID failed to secure a second five year term. Why did the Executive not give more support to the Town Centre Company to help it achieve its goal? Would he agree with me that we need illumination(s) not bleak darkness to both these questions and to the town centre this Christmas?

In reply, Councillor Williams stated that Taunton would not be without any form of Christmas lights. A lit tree would again be provided outside the Market House and a small number of trees would adorn both sides of North Street attached to properties. In addition, the Town Centre Company would be offering to supply further such trees to traders on application.

The Orchard Shopping Centre would also be providing a comprehensive display of Christmas decorations and lights from mid-November onwards.

Both the Council and the Town Centre Company would be working together to provide a Christmas Fair in Taunton on Sunday, 18 November 2012. This would have in the region of 100 exhibitors.

It was possible that the Council might also re-introduce the 'Free After Three' parking scheme in some of Taunton's Car Parks during the month of December in an effort to further increase footfall and trade in the town in the run up to Christmas.

Mr Dustyn Etherington of North Town Scouts explained to Councillors that he had been accompanied by a number of Scouts to the meeting as they were all aiming to obtain their Community Challenge badges. He added that several wished to ask questions, as follows:-

- Alex asked whether the Council had any plans to increase the number of cleaning patrols in Taunton? In response Councillor Hayward said that he was not aware of the need for any further litter collections. However, it was perhaps time for the Council to once again ask people not to drop litter;
- Jonathan asked what the Council would be providing to the youth of

Taunton to replace the Youth Service? Councillor Mrs Warmington replied that the Council was currently looking into this very issue;

- Joseph made reference to the fact that the Badger was the Scout's emblem. What did Councillors feel about the proposed culling. In reply, the Mayor said that this matter was going to be discussed as the next item on the agenda; and
- Dustyn Etherington asked the Council to consider providing more cycle routes throughout the town.

5. **Motion – Proposed Badger Cull**

Moved by Councillor Gaines and seconded by Councillor Ross.

“This Council notes the serious and damaging animal welfare and economic impact that Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) has on the farming community in the area. This Council also notes with concern the considerable public and scientific opposition to the Government's proposals to pilot a badger cull in areas including one that covers this Council.

The Council acknowledges scientific research that highlights the shortcomings in the Government's current proposals including a report by the Independent Scientific Group (ISG) that concluded that, ‘badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain’.

This Council recognises the strong public opposition to the cull and the arguments made by respected animal welfare organisations, such as the RSPCA, Badgers Trust, League Against Cruel Sports and Humane Society International that the current proposals would be ineffective and could eradicate 70% of badger populations.

Furthermore this Council believes that the Government would better serve the farming community by developing work on vaccinations for badgers to achieve the long-term eradication of the disease from livestock.

This Council resolves to write to the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs to:-

- Highlight the Council's concern about the practicalities as well as the welfare implications of the current proposed cull in the Wiveliscombe area of Taunton Deane;
- Object to the cull taking place on Council owned land; and
- Call on the Government to seek alternative methods to tackle the problem of Bovine Tuberculosis.”

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Hunt. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that as the wording did not negate the original motion it was acceptable:-

“This Council recognises the seriousness of Bovine TB and the possible links to badgers together with the difficulties of agreeing the most effective and humane method of dealing with this very important issue.

There are conflicting views from those for and against, but this Council is not competent nor does it have the expertise to make judgements as to the merits of the Governments proposed action therefore we remain neutral observers.

One thing is certain - all life is important and we urge the Government to put maximum resources into solving this crisis, because crisis it is, that impacts so much upon the stock of our local farmers and the wildlife which we acknowledge and understand causes so much distress.

This Council resolves to write to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Farming and Rural affairs to:-

- Highlight the depth of concern amongst some in our community that the proposed trials will not be effective; and
- Urge the Government to apply maximum resources possible to finding a humane solution to the ongoing crisis of Bovine TB”.

The amendment was put and was carried.

The substantive motion was put and was carried.

(Councillor C Hill declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest during the discussion of the Motion and left the meeting until the conclusion of the item.)

6. Recruitment of an Independent Person to work with Taunton Deane Borough Council’s Standards Committee

At the meeting of Full Council in July 2012, Members agreed a series of recommendations relating to the introduction of a new Standards Regime for Taunton Deane in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011.

One of the recommendations related to the appointment of an Independent Person to work with the Council’s new Standards Committee, together with a reserve.

Following public advertisement, four candidates were interviewed by a Panel of Councillors who unanimously agreed that Mrs Louise Somerville-Williams should be appointed as the Council’s Independent Person.

Mrs Somerville-Williams was ideally suited to this role having previously served as the Vice-Chairman of Mendip District Council’s Standards Committee over the past ten years.

The Panel had also unanimously agreed that Ms Lynda Williams, who had previously worked in various roles for Wiltshire Council, should be appointed as the reserve Independent Person.

Resolved that:-

- (1) Mrs Louise Somerville-Williams be appointed as Taunton Deane Borough Council's Independent Person to work alongside the Standard Committee; and
- (2) Ms Lynda Williams be appointed as Taunton Deane Borough Council's reserve Independent Person.

7. **Recommendations to Council from the Executive**

(a) Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership Tenancy Strategy

The Executive had recently considered proposals to develop a new sub-regional Tenancy Strategy for Somerset in partnership with a range of agencies including the five Somerset Districts and Registered Landlord Partners.

The Localism Act had introduced the requirement for all local housing authorities to publish a Strategic Tenancy Policy consistent with their Homeless Strategy and Allocation Scheme.

As Somerset already had a county-wide Homeless Strategy and Allocation Scheme (Homefinder Somerset) it was considered expedient to produce a county-wide Strategic Tenancy Policy, a copy of which had been made available to all Councillors.

The Strategy was intended to provide guidance to social and other landlords operating in Somerset, informing their policies and practices to produce lettings for customers that meet local housing need and improved market function.

The management and monitoring of the Strategy in the future would be through a Project Team reporting to the Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership through the Somerset Strategic Housing Group.

Resolved that the Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership Tenancy Strategy be adopted.

(The Chief Executive, Strategic Director (Shirlene Adam) and Democratic Services Manager and Corporate Support Lead all declared prejudicial interests in the following recommendation as beneficiaries under the Lease Car Scheme. They all left the room during consideration of the recommendation.)

(b) Review of Lease Car, Cash Alternative and Car Loan Schemes

Changes to the Lease Car and Cash Alternative Schemes and the Car Loan Scheme had recently been considered by the Executive.

The terms and conditions of employment for staff at Taunton Deane Borough Council were based on the National Terms and Conditions of Service for Local Government Services, as amended locally by the Council through collective agreements with UNISON as the recognised trade union.

These local terms included a frozen Lease Car and Cash Alternative Scheme and a Car Loan Scheme.

As part of the Budget Review Project these Schemes had been identified as possible staff benefits where changes could be made.

Advice from Counsel had been used to formulate a range of options which had been subject of extensive discussions with UNISON and the staff who would be affected by changes to the schemes.

As a result of this consultation, an amended proposal had been put together which would maintain a reduced Lease Car and Cash Alternative Scheme with the option to 'buy out' the contractual benefit of the car lease or cash alternative scheme with a payment equivalent to the current allowance of the affected employee.

The buy out option would be treated as an 'invest to save' initiative and would be funded by the use of General Fund Reserves. The maximum potential cost of buy out was estimated at £103,000.

If these proposals were agreed and implemented savings would be in the region of £57,500 per annum with effect from 1 April 2013.

Resolved that a supplementary estimate from General Fund Reserves of £89,000 and from Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Reserves of £14,000 - £103,000 in total - to fund the maximum potential cost of buy-out from the existing schemes, be approved.

(c) Update on the proposal to build a swimming pool at Blackbrook Pavilion Sports Centre and the refurbishment of Station Road Pool, Taunton

Councillor Mrs Herbert informed the Council that she had withdrawn the recommendation previously circulated to Members from the meeting.

8. Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors

The following reports were made to the Council on the main items of current and future business.

(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- Peer Challenge;
- Project Taunton;
- A303/A30/A358 Somerset County Council Initiative;
- Core Strategy;
- Budget Setting; and
- Local Enterprise Partnership.

(ii) **Environmental Services and Climate Change (Councillor Hayward)**

The report from Councillor Hayward drew attention to developments in the following areas:-

- Environmental Health;
- Climate Change / Carbon Management;
- Waste Management;
- Deane DLO Update; and
- Crematorium.

(iii) **Sport, Parks and Leisure (Councillor Mrs Herbert)**

The report from Councillor Mrs Herbert dealt with activities taking place in the following areas:-

- Parks;
- Community Leisure and Play; and
- Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities.

(iv) **Housing Services (Councillor Mrs Adkins)**

Councillor Mrs Adkins submitted her report which drew attention to the following:-

- Housing Enabling - Regeneration;
- Halcon Consultation;
- Affordable Housing Target;
- Affordable Housing Partnership;
- Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership;
- Estates Management; and
- Self-Financing and HRA Business Plan.

(v) **Corporate Resources (Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams)**

The report from Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams provided information on the following areas within her portfolio:-

- Customer Contact Centre;
- Corporate and Client Services;
- Corporate Performance;

- Legal and Democratic Services; and
- Revenues and Benefits.

(vi) **Planning, Transportation and Communications (Councillor Edwards)**

The report from Councillor Edwards provided information on the following areas within his portfolio:-

- Core Strategy;
- Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan;
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA);
- Neighbourhood Planning;
- Community Infrastructure Levy;
- Planning;
- Heritage – Sandhill Park, Tone Works and Tonedale;
- Landscape Team Report;
- Parking Service; and
- Communications.

(vii) **Community Leadership (Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington)**

Councillor Mrs Warmington presented the Community Leadership report which focused on the following areas within that portfolio:-

- Police and Crime Panel;
- Safer Somerset Partnership
- Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Panel;
- Health and Wellbeing;
- Priority Areas Strategy;
- Somerset Village Agents;
- Community Clean Up Days;
- Halcon Breakfast Club;
- Community Activity Days;
- Family Futures (Troubled Families); and
- Safeguarding.

(viii) **Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Tourism (Councillor Cavill)**

The report from Councillor Cavill covered:-

- Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP);
- Taunton Town Centre Company (and BID);
- The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre;
- Marketing Strategy;
- Floodlighting of the Borough's Churches;
- Jobs Clubs;
- Business Support and Liaison;

- Hinkley Nuclear New Build
- Forthcoming events;
- Taunton Tourist Information, Ticket and Travel Centre; and
- Asset Management.

(Councillor Mrs Messenger left the meeting at 7.46 pm. Councillors Ms Durdan and Mrs Lees left the meeting at 8.10pm. Councillors Ms Palmer, Henley, Prior-Sankey, Bowrah, Brooks, Wren, Mrs Hill, D Wedderkopp and Mullins left the meeting at 8.15 pm, 8.45 pm, 8.47 pm, 9.05 pm, 9.13 pm, 9.24 pm, 9.26 pm, 9.28 pm and 9.29 pm respectively.)

(The meeting ended at 9.35 pm.)

