

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 11 December 2012 at 6.30 pm.

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

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 2 October 2012, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Govier, D Reed and Ross.

3. Declaration of Interests

Councillors A Govier, Henley and Mrs Waymouth declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Brooks, Prior-Sankey and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council and personal and prejudicial interests in agenda item 11 (iv) (a) as a family member was either in receipt of, or in the process of applying for, Council Tax Benefit. 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. Councillor 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. Councillors D Durdan and Stone declared prejudicial interests as Tone Leisure Board representatives. 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 and a Patron of the Supporters of Taunton Women's Aid. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as a local owner of land in Taunton Deane. Councillors R Lees, Mrs Messenger and Mrs Warmington declared personal and prejudicial interests in agenda item 11 (iv) (a) as a family member was either in receipt of, or in the process of applying for, Council Tax Benefit. Councillor Coles declared a

personal interest in agenda item 11 (iii) (a) as he was a member of Somerset County Cricket Club.

4. **Somerset Armed Forces Community Covenant**

Councillor Bowrah reported that in July, Councillor Williams, along with the other partner representatives, officially signed the Somerset Armed Forces Community Covenant at a ceremony at RAF Yeovilton.

The Somerset Armed Forces Community was made up of both the serving and former members of the Armed Forces, including Territorial and Volunteer Reserve Forces and their families, who were working and residing in Somerset.

The Covenant had been made between the Armed Forces and a number of partners including the six Somerset Councils, the Local Health Authority, the Business Community, local education interests, the Charitable and Voluntary Sector and Religious Communities.

It was a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community which sought to complement the National Armed Forces Covenant.

The purpose of the Somerset Community Covenant was to encourage support for the Services Community and recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of this Community.

For Taunton Deane, the Covenant presented an opportunity to bring knowledge, experience and expertise, to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of our Armed Forces Community. It would encourage the integration of Service life into civilian communities and also offered the opportunity for members of the Armed Forces Community to help their local community.

The supporting objectives of the Covenant's continuing work plan would include, but were not limited to, the following:-

- To monitor the changing military footprint within Somerset;
- To establish the economic contribution of the military to the County;
- To identify community building projects for the military community;
- To identify opportunities for projects, which would enhance closer integration between civilian and military communities in Somerset;
- To assist the realignment of and access to, services which met the changing needs of the military, their families and veterans;

- To ensure that Somerset remained an attractive county for long-term investment by the Ministry of Defence (MoD); and
- To create an imaginative and practical educational and training scheme for veterans and their families to encourage productive re-settlement in Somerset.

Taunton Deane was looking to further enhance our relationship with the local Armed Forces and reservists, through our Human Resources (HR), Housing and Benefit departments, as well as building on the already strong relationships built with them over many years, through the Civic Office.

Councillor Bowrah went on to say that ex-service employees were automatically reservists, who could be called up at any time up to the age of 55. However there was currently no way of monitoring how many reservists or ex-service employees there were at Taunton Deane Borough Council, nor was there any system of encouraging employees to join the Territorial Army or Reserve Forces.

HR was considering what we should do now regarding this, what we had been asked to sign up to and also to have a full understanding of the MoD consultation taking place with employers, on changes to all of the arrangements contained in Employment Law Bulletin 595.

In the very near future, the Government would be stating the future position of our Armed Forces which could very well have a sizeable impact on Taunton Deane, regarding housing, employment and other services.

Councillor Bowrah concluded by reporting that 40 Commando RM would be exercising their right to “March Through” Taunton when they returned from their current tour of duty in Afghanistan in May next Year and the Rifles, who had also previously been awarded the Freedom of Taunton, were planning an event later in 2013.

He thanked Councillors for listening.

5. Motion – Parking and Public Transport in Taunton

Moved by Councillor Horsley and seconded by Councillor Coles.

“This Council fully supports the drive to ensure the long term viability of the Taunton Town Centre Shopping Area and to resist measures to encourage out of town shopping applications in accordance with the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and the recently adopted Core Strategy.

The Council also notes that in the past three years it has closed Greenbrook Terrace, Castle Green, parts of Coal Orchard, Castle Street and Enfield Car Parks with the loss of 361 car parking spaces most completely or partially zoned for shopping in the town centre. In addition it has lost part of the Priory Bridge Road Car Park to office development with a further 264 spaces going.

In conjunction with Somerset County Council, it has provided two Park and Ride sites at Silk Mills to the West and at junction 25 of the M5 to the East.

This Council notes that traffic congestion in the town centre has increased significantly over the past few weeks and delays in movement are reducing footfall in the town centre. The lack of electronic signing about availability of car parking spaces for shoppers adds to the disquiet for the town centre retailers. The retailers are equally vociferous about the extra distance shoppers now have to walk to reach their destinations following the closures mentioned above damaging their businesses.

This Council therefore urges Somerset County Council to:-

- (a) Open its Park and Ride on Sundays in the period up to Christmas 2013;
- (b) To permit bus pass users to travel free from the Park and Ride sites to compete with Exeter and similar venues around the region; and
- (c) Introduce as quickly as possible electronic signing of availability of parking spaces on the main arterial routes into Taunton.

Furthermore, to enhance the encouragement of shoppers to come to Taunton, it urges the Council to adopt immediately the discount equivalent to three hours free parking for those customers who spend up to £20 in selected stores in the town centre as already negotiated with Debenhams and to extend this system as widely as possible. It urges the Council to allocate an officer to devote time immediately to address these issues especially the introduction of the discount scheme for shoppers parking in the town centre.”

During the discussion of this motion, Councillor Mrs Hill proposed, and Councillor Mrs Floyd seconded that sub- paragraph (a) above be amended to read “Open its Park and Ride on Sundays and on Thursday late shopping nights in the period up to Christmas 2013”.

The amendment was accepted by the mover and seconder of the motion

The mover and seconder of the motion requested that a formal roll call of votes be taken and recorded in the Minutes in accordance with Standing Order 18(2).

The motion was put and was lost with twenty five Councillors voting in favour of the amendment and twenty six Councillors voting against, as follows:-

Yes	No
Councillor Mrs Baker	Councillor Mrs Adkins
Councillor Brooks	Councillor Mrs Allgrove
Councillor Coles	Councillor Beaven
Councillor Farbahi	Councillor Bishop
Councillor Mrs Floyd	Councillor Bowrah
Councillor Gaines	Councillor Cavill

Councillor Mrs Hill	Councillor Denington
Councillor Horsley	Councillor D Durdan
Councillor Miss James	Councillor Miss Durdan
Councillor R Lees	Councillor Edwards
Councillor Mrs Lees	Councillor A Govier
Councillor Ms Lisgo	Councillor Hall
Councillor Mrs Messenger	Councillor Hayward
Councillor Morrell	Councillor Mrs Herbert
Councillor Mullins	Councillor C Hill
Councillor Prior-Sankey	Councillor Hunt
Councillor Gill Slattery	Councillor Meikle
Councillor T Slattery	Councillor Nottrodt
Councillor Mrs Smith	Councillor Ms Palmer
Councillor P Smith	Councillor Mrs Reed
Councillor Stone	Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams
Councillor Swaine	Councillor Mrs Warmington
Councillor Tooze	Councillor Watson
Councillor A Wedderkopp	Councillor Mrs Waymouth
Councillor D Wedderkopp	Councillor Williams
	Councillor Wren

6. **Motion – Economic Growth and Regeneration**

Moved by Councillor Horsley and seconded by Councillor Coles.

“The Council notes that the Local Government Association Peer Group Review urges Taunton Deane to put economic growth and regeneration as its top priority in formulating its Corporate Business Plan. It notes too that the Council should adopt a policy of acquiring assets which provide an “income stream” to meet the reduction in expenditure brought about by the recession and the cuts demanded by central Government.

The Council therefore deeply regrets that the opportunity to pursue a bid to acquire the Orchard Centre from JP Morgan was not followed through as it would have:-

- (a) Secured the future of the Taunton Town Centre;
- (b) Given the Council the chance to redevelop the retail offer here;
- (c) Resisted applications for retail development out of town; and
- (d) Provided the Council with an income stream of some 6% per annum to assist in reducing the budget deficits identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Council recognises that these circumstances have shown it to be ill equipped to meet the commercial realities of our time and demands that the ruling group sets its sights higher.”

The motion was put and was carried.

7. Changes to the Standards Committee and appointment of the Independent Co-optees

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 those recommendations was to create a Standards Committee and decide its composition. Full Council agreed that there should be a Committee of nine made up of five elected Members, politically balanced, two parish representatives and two co-opted members.

Three of the ex-independent members of the Standards Committee had recently been interviewed by a Panel of Councillors for the independent co-optee positions on the new Standards Committee.

The Panel had found it extremely difficult to choose two out of the three members as all were extremely knowledgeable and would bring a great deal of experience to the Committee. The Monitoring Officer had confirmed that subject to Full Council agreement the number of independent co-optees on the Committee could be extended.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the number of Independent co-optees able to sit on the Standards Committee be increased to three; and
- (2) Anne Elder, Terry Bowditch and Adrian Cox be appointed to those roles.

7. Recommendations to Council from the Executive

(a) Review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012-2042

The first review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2012-2042 had recently been undertaken.

In the first few months of the financial year it had become apparent that there were a number of issues – set out below – that required amendment or inclusion in the Business Plan, as the context in which Housing Services operated continued to change rapidly.

Uplift of Disabled Facilities Grant and Aids and Adaptations Budget

The HRA had budgeted £500,000 capital per year to provide disabled aids and adaptations for tenants in our stock. This work was undertaken by the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP).

In view of the fact that need is likely to increase in future years as the

population aged, SWPSHP had been commissioned to undertake a needs analysis. For business planning purposes it was thought prudent to increase this provision by 5% per year for the next 10 years and then for it to remain fixed for the remainder of the plan period.

Stock Investment Figures and Data Cleanse

Work had been undertaken to cleanse the stock data of certain inaccuracies and carry out stock condition surveys. The impact of this work had been a slight reduction in the Future Major Works requirement for our stock over 30 years of approximately £4,000,000.

However, there remained a significant backlog of work created in part by tenant refusals for improvement works previously and other works not completed as part of the Decent Homes programme. As a consequence, the overall capital expenditure over the 30 year period had risen to £191,000,000.

Extension of Properties

The review had identified the need for a budget to provide Housing Services with an additional means of helping to alleviate the housing need of those who were living in overcrowded conditions. It was proposed to create a new improvements budget of £160,000 per year to fund approximately 4 two storey extensions per year.

Related Assets

In the original Business Plan an additional budget allocation of £3,600,000 over 30 years and £600,000 in Years 1-5, for related assets had been made. This was in respect of a programme of repairs for non dwelling assets such as garages and sewage treatment works.

Environmental Improvements

£150,000 per annum had been allocated for environmental improvements on estates such as additional car parking, waste storage facilities, mobility scooter stores and fencing.

Sustainable Energy Fund

A Sustainable Energy Fund of £6,600,000 over 30 years had been established to provide affordable warmth and improve the energy efficiency of homes. In order to utilise this fund, a project was emerging which had two key elements - 'Retrofit works to properties' and 'Tenant Lifestyle Awareness'.

Full project planning, commissioning and evaluation would be required and it was felt that recruitment of a Project Manager to undertake the next level of detailed planning would be required.

Social Housing Development Fund (SHDF)

Following the establishment of this fund (£2,300,000 in the first four years) in the new Business Plan work had progressed to identify sites that may be suitable for development.

Reported that approximately 26 new units were feasible, at an approximate cost of £3,430,000. If the Phase 1 sites were to be delivered, an additional

£1,130,000 would need to be added to the Capital Programme.

Alongside these early wins in terms of site development, Taunton Deane also needed to create a development policy to frame the way in which this fund would be used and to identify some of the relevant variables concerning house building. An Interim Development Policy had been drafted which was included in the report to the Executive. .

Exceptional Extensive

Funding amounting to £18,300,000 over 30 years for works such as asbestos removal, subsidence and works to our non traditional properties had been allocated in the Business Plan. Survey work was due to take place shortly to assist in planning for the future of non traditional stock in the years to come.

Planned Maintenance

One of the changes that was made following the “No” vote to stock transfer in 2006, was to reduce the frequency of planned maintenance from a cycle of five years to eight years. It was now potentially possible to reverse this position and re-establish a five-yearly programme.

Welfare Reform

An emerging Housing Services Welfare Reform Strategy had set out actions over the next 12 to 24 months for effectively managing the changes contained in the Government’s Welfare Reform Programme.

However a potential impact was that the level of financial hardship was likely to increase in the community with greater challenges in collecting rent being experienced and debt levels likely to increase.

The amount of irrecoverable debt could also increase leading to a higher level of write offs. Consequently, it was proposed to increase the bad debt allowance in the HRA Business Plan from 0.5% to 2% for a period of three years.

Right to Buy review and policy on use of additional receipts

The Council had signed an agreement with the Government under which the Council would continue to receive the income it was expecting from Right to Buy (RtB) receipts and this income would continue to support the Council’s General Fund Capital Programme.

The additional receipts produced from the completion of a total of 18 properties in the current year showed potential additional receipts in Year 1 of approximately £600,000.

To meet the conditions of the agreement and keep the additional income, the £600,000 would need to be matched with £1,400,000 of other resources such that total expenditure on affordable housing would reach £2,000,000 between April 2012 and March 2015.

Staffing

Development Team staffing

In order to deliver the projects identified above, additional resources would be required to lead on the HRA's development activities.

1. Housing Enabling - The current part time post holder would increase hours from three days a week to four on a temporary basis. The HRA would pay for two days of this officer's time to work on site development. The remaining two days would be committed to continuing regeneration projects funded from the SHDF.

2. Housing Development Projects Lead (Sustainable Energy) - A temporary post (18 months) would be recruited to lead on the Sustainable Energy project and other related projects in the HRA. This post would be funded from the Sustainable Energy Fund.

3. Housing Development Projects Lead - An additional post would be recruited to bring forward some of the capital projects with new allocated resources. This post would be funded by the Exceptional Extensive and Environmental Improvements budgets.

4. Development Manager - It was proposed to create a senior manager position to oversee all development activity, and potentially draw together the above posts to create a small Development Team. It was proposed that an additional salaries allocation of £70,000 should be made for this post and administrative support.

Repairs Line

The Repairs Line service was open to Housing tenants to report repairs required Monday to Friday. It was proposed to restore staffing levels by the 26 hours lost over the past few years. The additional cost of this proposal was £15,000.

IT Improvement

Taunton Deane Housing currently used four business critical software applications. Deane DLO would be replacing its dated software system which would involve certain changes having to be made to the other three applications. These works would require around three years to complete at an approximate total one off cost of £500,000, with continuing costs of £33,000 per annum ongoing.

Other Financial Adjustments

Inflation Adjustment

Retail Price Index (RPI) inflation had been falling in recent months and had reduced substantially over the past 12 months. It would therefore be prudent to reduce the level of inflation included within the model from 3.5% to 2.5%.

Interest Rate Saving

Due to better interest rates than modelled at the point of the transaction there

were additional savings in the Business Plan of £936,000 in Year 1. It was considered inadvisable to use interest savings at this time to pay off any debt capital.

The difference in interest rate on the loans had also affected the forecasted investment income on the HRA reserve balance, and the overall net saving was now estimated to be £817,000.

The HRA was likely to generate significant cash surpluses over the long term. It was proposed to establish a principle that surplus resources should be added to the Social Housing Development Fund, where prudent, to support further affordable housing provision. This was seen as a more sensible alternative to building excessive balances in the HRA reserve.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Adkins, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Disabled Facilities Grant and Aids and Adaptations budget be uplifted by 5% for the next ten years pending the outcome of the needs analysis;
- (2) A new improvements budget of £160,000 per year be created which would be used to fund approximately 4 two storey extensions per year;
- (3) Extending the reach of the current Social Housing Development Fund by utilising some of the borrowing headroom towards funding for housing development be explored;
- (4) The Interim Development Policy set out in the report to the Executive be approved;
- (5) Allowance for bad debt in the HRA be increased to 2% for a period of three years from 1 April 2013;
- (6) The additional Right to Buy receipts be ring-fenced and allocated to a separate budget code. Subsequently proposals would be brought to Members to make decisions as to how they were allocated - either to traditional housing enabling projects or to development within the Housing Revenue Account, on the basis of the continuing project need and spending the receipts within the restrictions of the agreement with the Government;
- (7) The outlined approach to additional staffing to support the Business Plan objectives and a consequent increase in revenue staffing costs of £55,000 be agreed;
- (8) It be agreed that any surplus Social Housing Development Fund budget remaining at the end of any financial year be allocated to a new Social Housing Development Fund earmarked Housing Revenue Account reserve; and

- (9) The principle be agreed that surplus cash resources within the Housing Revenue Account be allocated to the new Social Housing Development Fund Reserve at the end of each financial year, where prudent.

(b) Earmarked Reserves Review

A review had recently been undertaken of a number of earmarked reserves held by the Council to ensure that the level of each reserve was adequate and that the purpose for which the funds were set aside still applied.

The level of earmarked General Fund reserves as at 31 March 2012 was £7,072,000. This included money set aside for specific revenue purposes, but did not include the £3,336,000 in General Fund balances.

As a result of the review, there were various earmarked reserves, totalling £298,819.52, that were no longer required.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that:-

- (i) £59,167.44 of surplus earmarked reserves be transferred to the General Fund Reserves in the current financial year; and
- (ii) £239,652.08 of surplus earmarked reserves be transferred to the Housing Revenue Account Reserve in the current financial year.

(c) Fees and Charges 2013/2014

Consideration had been given to the proposed fees and charges for 2013/2014 for the following services:-

- Cemeteries and Crematorium;
- Waste Services;
- Housing;
- Deane Helpline;
- Licensing;
- Planning;
- Environmental Health; and
- Charging for Housing Act (Improvement and Prohibition) Notices and Immigration Visits.

Details of the proposed increases were submitted. No increase was proposed to Land Charges fees or the fees for recovering Court Costs.

The results of previous public consultation events had clearly indicated that the public preferred to see increases in fees and charges, rather than in Council Tax, as a way for the Council to raise income.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that the fees and charges for 2013/2014 in respect of Cemeteries and Crematorium, Waste Services, Housing, Deane Helpline, Licensing, Planning and Environmental Health and Housing Act Notices/Immigration Visits be agreed.

(d) Proposed loan to Somerset County Cricket Club to enable development

The Executive had recently considered a request from the Somerset County Cricket Club (SCCC) for the Council to provide loan finance of £1,000,000 to enable the County Ground to become a venue which could stage one-day and twenty-twenty international cricket matches.

SCCC had made its request to the Council for the following reasons:-

- (1) The proposed terms of the loan would be much more attractive than could be achieved through bank funding;
- (2) The England and Wales Cricket Board had recently approved the move of the County Ground to international status, but this had to be achieved within a three year period or the approval would be withdrawn; and
- (3) The benefits of staging international cricket were considerable in contributing to the economic regeneration of Taunton and SCCC believed that Council loan support would enable the Club to stage international matches within a five year period.

It was within the power of the Council to offer the type of loan sought provided there was no cost to the local taxpayer. Making such a loan for capital purposes would be treated as capital expenditure and the repayment of the loan principal would be treated as capital receipts.

The type of loan recommended was the Equal Instalments of Principal (EIP) type where repayments would be the same amount of principal each year plus interest on a reducing balance.

The interest rate charged would be based on the PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) rate at which Taunton Deane could borrow, plus a 2% risk premium.

The capital expenditure incurred by the Council in making the loan would be funded by "internal" borrowing. Prudent provision would therefore need to be made to repay the borrowing under the Minimum Revenue Provision

regulations.

The loan would be secured by a legal charge over the property owned by the SCCC.

Moved by Councillor Horsley, seconded by Councillor Mrs Smith that:-

- (i) The risk premium be raised from 2% to 3%; and
- (ii) The recommendation be altered to include "(c) £10,000 of the interest paid per annum be allocated to the Youth Fund to be used to meet the cost of approved projects across the Taunton Deane area".

The amendment was put and was lost.

On the the motion of Councillor Cavill, it was

Resolved that the principle of a 15 year £1,000,000 loan to the Somerset County Cricket Club to enable further improvements towards the County Ground becoming a venue for international matches be approved, subject to:-

- (a) Final terms of the loan being approved on the lines detailed in the report and by the Section 151 Officer; and
- (b) Agreement from the Somerset County Cricket Club to enter into a legal agreement to be approved by the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer that safeguarded the Council's financial position.

(e) Taunton Deane Business Investment Fund

The Council had an ambitious strategy of growth for Taunton Deane. One important element of this strategy was that by 2027 the district would sustain an additional 11,900 jobs.

The environment to attract mobile investment was competitive, as most Councils carried out marketing activities, sometimes enhanced by specific inward investment incentives.

The Council already operated a Small Business Grant for start up businesses in Taunton Deane and also assisted rural Post Offices and retailers through financial support and assistance. The Council also funded loan finance to businesses through the Fredericks Foundation.

However, the Council had recently been approached by a business that was currently looking to invest in Wellington, which would result in the creation of around 200 jobs. It had asked the Council for a financial contribution towards its investment.

Furthermore, there were two existing businesses, also in Wellington, that urgently required new premises to enable them to expand and create jobs. Without financial assistance neither would be able to invest, and both might

leave Taunton Deane.

To enable such assistance to be provided, it was proposed to identify a fund to encourage and facilitate local job creation. The amount of that fund would be £300,000 and would support an Investment Grant scheme, payable to businesses.

The Investment Grant would be tied directly to job creation and would be offered at the level of £1,000 per FTE new job created, up to a ceiling of £100,000 for any one business. It was also proposed to put a minimum size on the application and to support a minimum of 10 jobs in any one submission.

The Investment Grant would be open to businesses in all sectors and throughout Taunton Deane and applicants would have to demonstrate that the following conditions had been met:-

- The Council's Grant was matched in at least equal part by the business's own financial contribution;
- The Council's grant was directly related to the creation of new jobs within the company. Those jobs had to be based in Taunton Deane and be offered on the basis that they were permanent positions. If jobs disappeared within a two year period the Council would retain the right to reclaim the money;
- The Council's financial contribution did not breach EU State Aid Rules; and
- Projects to be supported were ready to proceed within an agreed maximum period.

The Council's grant support would lead to the direct creation of a defined number of jobs, which could be valued based on the earnings of each job created. The average annual salary for a full time employee in Taunton Deane was £22,318. If the grant led to the creation of one job per £1,000 grant, the £300,000 fund would directly generate £6,695,400 of new earnings.

Currently insufficient financial incentives existed to support businesses to invest into or expand in Taunton Deane. An Investment Fund, with an Investment Grant, would significantly enhance the Council's offer, and would enable it to put real money into its stated growth strategy to attract new businesses and to support growth amongst local, existing businesses.

On the motion of Councillor Cavill, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) The sum of £300,000 be allocated from within the existing 2012/2013 Budget to a Business Investment Fund, which would encourage investment in Taunton Deane and would directly lead to job creation in the district; and

- (2) Authority to approve individual grant applications be delegated to the Executive Portfolio holder for Economic Development and Regeneration in conjunction with the relevant Director and Section 151 Officer.

(f) Castle Green, Taunton Completion Works

The initial works at Castle Green, Taunton were now almost finished. Only the correction of a small number of agreed defects and the installation of a ramp to the grassed area remained to be completed.

The scheme agreed by Members and for which planning permission and Scheduled Ancient Monument consent had been obtained also included:-

- Closure of Castle Way to all vehicles;
- Resurfacing of Castle Way in the same materials as the rest of Castle Green;
- Relocation of the bus stops from Castle Way to Corporation Street;
- Installation of new planter beds on both sides of Castle Way;
- Installation of a turning head at the junction of Castle Green and Castle Way; and
- Reprioritisation and re-marking of the junction of Tower Street and Castle Street.

The cost of completing the agreed scheme was £340,000. This was £200,000 more than the remaining approved budget for the following reasons:-

- (i) £64,000 of additional costs relating to the initial works as a result of delays in laying the stone setts caused by extreme wet weather during late spring and early summer;
- (ii) £64,000 of additional costs relating to the initial works as a result of archaeological excavations, investigation and recording;
- (iii) £50,000 of additional costs relating to the completion works as a result of the delays in agreeing a satisfactory scheme to relocate the bus stops with the County Council; and
- (iv) £22,000 of additional costs for new bus shelters as the positioning of these was now expected to be adjacent to the Old Municipal Buildings listed building and therefore had to be in keeping.

£50,000 of savings had been identified which reduced the budgetary shortfall to £150,000 which could be funded from unallocated resources in the Growth Points capital reserve.

On the motion of Councillor Cavill, it was

Resolved that a further £150,000 of Growth Points capital funding be transferred to the Council's Capital Programme in respect of the completion

works for Castle Green, Taunton.

(g) Local Council Tax Support Scheme for Taunton Deane

The proposed introduction of a Local Council Tax Support Scheme for Taunton Deane to replace the current national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme had recently been considered by the Executive.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 provided for the abolition of Council Tax Benefit, to take effect from 1 April 2013 and each Council Tax Billing Authority had to have its own, locally set, Council Tax Support Scheme, effective from the same date.

Although the Council had discretion concerning the rules of the local scheme as far as they affected people of working age, the Government intended to prescribe rules which did not permit a reduction in expenditure for people of pensionable age.

In common with their Somerset Council counterparts, Taunton Deane proposed to base the local CT scheme in Year 1 for working age citizens on the broad principles of the present CTB scheme given that the existing benefit system had been developed to protect a number of disadvantaged groups and carried least risk in terms of software development.

A number of features of the current scheme had been assessed to see if the changes would deliver the reduction in expenditure necessary to match the likely grant from the Government. Certain common scenarios had also been considered collectively to see if they would potentially be suitable to all Somerset authorities.

From those discussions, the key changes which were proposed between Taunton Deane's local scheme for working age claimants and the current CTB scheme were:-

- Maximum support would be 75-80% of Council Tax – everyone of working age would have to pay something;
- Non-dependant deductions would be increased;
- Second adult rebate to cease;
- Child maintenance to be counted as income;
- Earned income disregards to rise; and
- A hardship fund to be established for short term help. (This would be a collection fund commitment rather than be fully funded by Taunton Deane).

The draft proposals for Taunton Deane's Local Council Tax Support Scheme

had been subject to an extensive public consultation exercise which ran over eight weeks, commencing 6 August until 5 October 2012.

A total of 113 responses to Taunton Deane's consultation were received. Across Somerset as a whole a total of 3,508 responses were made to the consultation of whom 59% were respondents in receipt of CTB.

There was nothing arising from the consultation response which demonstrated overwhelming opposition to any particular element of the proposed scheme or to the scheme itself although some respondents had highlighted that the proposals were likely to have an appreciable adverse impact on their particular household finances.

A copy of the full, proposed Council Tax Support Scheme together with a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment had been circulated to Members to ensure the issues connected with the scheme were fully understood prior to a decision being taken.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams, it was

Resolved that subject to the Government making the necessary regulations:-

- (a) The scheme for providing Council Tax support for working age households on low incomes from 1 April 2013, as set out in the report to the Executive, be adopted; and
- (b) The Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Assistance Policy to enable additional short-term assistance to be given in respect of Council Tax for those in hardship from 1 April 2013 be also adopted.

(h) Council Tax Charges – Empty Properties and Second Homes

Consideration had been given to the Government's proposal to allow Council's to amend (within limits) the Council Tax charges which would apply from 1 April 2013 in respect of:-

- second homes;
- homes undergoing, or requiring, structural work;
- properties empty for six months or less; and
- properties that had been empty for more than two years.

Decreasing the reductions would increase the Tax collectable for both this Council and the precepting authorities and could act as a stimulus for bringing empty properties back into occupation.

Full details of the proposed changes to the Council's current level of charging had been circulated to Members.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams, it was

Resolved that subject to the Government making the necessary regulations, the following changes to Council Tax charges be introduced from 1 April 2013:-

- (i) To allow a discount of 100% for a maximum of 12 months, in respect of properties which would have qualified for a Class A exemption, had that exemption continued;
- (ii) To allow a 100% discount, but limited to a maximum period of three months, in respect of properties which would otherwise have qualified for a Class C exemption, had that exemption continued;
- (iii) To remove the 10% discount on second homes; and
- (iv) To impose a premium levy of an additional 50% of Council Tax due on properties that had been empty and unfurnished for more than two years.

(i) Revenues and Benefits Service Feasibility Service

The feasibility of bringing the Revenues and Benefits service back in-house in response to the forthcoming changes which were likely through the Government's proposals for Welfare Reform and the localisation of Business Rates had recently been discussed.

The Government's proposals were likely to result in significant changes in workload for the Revenues and Benefits service coupled with an overall cut in the Government grant that was received to administer benefits.

Three key objectives for the Council as to how the legislative changes in the Revenues and Benefits service should be carried out had been identified as follows:-

- i) To minimise the cost to the Authority and the impact on customers of implementing the changes to the Benefits and Local Taxation Regulations;
- ii) To maximise the Council's flexibility to manage the Revenues and Benefits service resources through the period of significant change; and
- iii) Look to reduce the costs to the Council of delivering the Revenues and Benefits service.

Two broad options for accommodating these changes within the contract with Southwest One had been tested against these objectives. These were:-

Option 1 - Changing the pricing model within the contract to provide a pricing structure that could keep pace with a rapidly changing environment and varying workloads, whilst ensuring the Council maintained service delivery; or

Option 2 - Return the Revenues and Benefits service to in-house service provision through the service termination provisions built into the contract.

Both options had been discussed with Southwest One and it has been agreed that Option 2 would be the most effective solution to allow Taunton Deane to meet the objectives outlined above.

As a result, a detailed study into the feasibility of bringing the service back in-house has been undertaken which had concluded that it would be feasible to:-

- make this change from a financial perspective and to do so would not be prejudicial to the Council's overall budget position; and
- terminate the Revenues and Benefits service within the terms of the contract and to amend the contract to reflect this change.

Negotiations with Southwest One had been completed on the key elements of a termination agreement. Consequently the Council was now in a position to make a decision to terminate.

An 'in principle' agreement with Southwest One had been reached for the service to be returned on 1 April 2013 and for the termination costs to be limited to the fixed amount only.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams, it was

Resolved that:-

- i) The Revenues and Benefits service element of the Southwest One contract be terminated and the Corporate and Client Services Manager be authorised to issue the required termination notice with immediate effect;
- ii) The Corporate and Client Services Manager be authorised to complete the necessary changes to the contract to implement the termination of the Revenues and Benefits service in line with the 'in principle' termination agreement;
- iii) Decision making authority be delegated to the Group Leaders, if required, to decide upon any key changes to the agreement (It was not anticipated that this would be required, but this delegation was recommended to facilitate quick decision making should any key changes be required between now and completing the detailed contract changes at the end of January 2013); and
- iv) Up to £20,000 be allocated to cover the cost of additional resource required to support the service transfer and staff transition (This would be funded from the initial savings set out in the report to the Executive).

Resolved that Standing Order 28, Time limits for all meetings, be suspended to enable the meeting to continue for a further half an hour.

(j) Refurbishment of Station Road Pool and Sport England Bid

The proposal for the refurbishment of the Station Road Pool in Taunton had previously been presented to Members as part of the overall Pools Provision Project.

The findings of the Swimming Task and Finish Review along with the further feasibility work of the Pools Provision Project had identified that the required Capital investment needed to ensure that Station Road Pool continued to remain attractive to users was in the order of £1,200,000

It had also been identified that to ensure the delivery of sufficient swimming provision and preserve the existing water space already available would require the combination of the delivery of a new pool and the refurbishment of Station Road Pool.

An opportunity for the Council to apply to the Sport England Improvement Fund for funding of up to £500,000 specifically for improvements to swimming pool changing rooms, had become available earlier in the year.

A two stage application had been made to Sport England and at the end of October 2012 the Council was informed that it had been selected for the final application stage.

The final stage bid was driven by a short timescale set by Sport England where the final and third stage application had to be submitted by 18 January 2013.

One of the key criteria to satisfy eligibility to receive the funding was a confirmed commitment from the Council to provide funding to meet the remainder of the overall £1,200,000 refurbishment project.

If successful, the Sport England Funding would be dedicated to improving the changing rooms, changing room plant and the reception area.

The £770,000 to be provided by the Council would fund the upgrade of pool plant equipment, refurbishment of the pool hall and pool disinfectant system.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Herbert, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Council's bid for Sport England Improvement funding of up to £500,000 towards the Station Road Swimming Pool Refurbishment Project be supported; and
- (2) The proposed contribution of £770,000 from Taunton Deane's unallocated capital receipts be approved.

(k) Orchard Multi-Storey Car Park, Taunton – Structural Survey and Lifts

The Executive had recently considered the findings and recommendations of specialist investigations into the condition of the Orchard Multi-Storey Car Park structure and its integral lifts.

Although the structure had performed well over the past 40 years and was not in danger of failing, there were repairs and protective measures which needed to be carried out to prevent further deterioration and to provide a parking environment that was both safe and attractive to motorists. The works fell into three categories:-

Capital	
Structural repair work required within 12 months	£27,500
Preventative maintenance work required within five years (to give a life beyond 10 years)	£705,000
Revenue	
Minor repairs and redecorations	£25,000

The three passenger lifts within the car park were of a similar age and breakdowns were not an irregular occurrence, leading to public frustration and complaint. The lift maintenance contractor had estimated that it was likely to cost an additional £180,000 to fully refurbish them.

The Capital Estimate provision for works to the Orchard Multi-Storey Car Park was currently £245,000 and following detailed discussion, the Executive had agreed that this finance should be used on replacing all three lifts as a matter of priority.

The Executive had also considered that the Capital resources amounting to £164,000 which remained unallocated should be allocated towards the other works needed at the car park and that the shortfall of funding required to complete all the works to the car park should be accumulated from Revenue Contributions to Capital Outlay over the next four years.

On the motion of Councillor Edwards, it was

Resolved that the identified structural and preventative maintenance works to the Orchard Multi-Storey Car Park be included in the future Capital Programme – funded by the £164,000 of unallocated Capital resources and a four years Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) of £125,750 (to be agreed as part of the Budget Setting for the 2013/2014 Financial Year).

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

Due to Standing Order 28, Time limits for all meetings, insufficient time was available to enable the following Executive Councillor reports to be formally presented to Members. These reports were submitted for information only.

(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- Flooding;
- Budget Setting;

- Project Taunton;
- A303/A30/A358 Somerset County Council Initiative;
- Infrastructure Costs and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); and
- Local Enterprise Partnership.

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

The report from Councillor Cavill covered:-

- Launch of Taunton Means Business;
- Launch of Taunton Events website;
- Taunton Local Enterprise and Innovation Area;
- Business Start up Grants and Rural Retailer Grants;
- Jobs Clubs;
- Taunton Youth and Community Centre;
- Recent Events; and
- Taunton Tourist Information, Ticket and Travel Centre update.

(iii) **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; and
- Deane DLO.

(iv) **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.

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

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

- Affordable Housing Target;
- Right to Buy Sales; Housing Enabling - Regeneration;
- Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership;
- Estates Management – Anti-social Behaviour;

- Self-Financing and HRA Business Plan; and
- Shelter.

(vi) **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.

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

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

- Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan;
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA);
- Authorities Monitoring Report;
- Technical Policy Reports;
- Neighbourhood Planning;
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Positive Planning Protocol;
- Heritage – Sandhill Park, Tonedale and Tone Works; and
- Communications.

(viii) **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 Commissioner;
- Safer Somerset Partnership
- Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Panel;
- Health and Wellbeing;
- Priority Areas Strategy; and
- Family Futures (Troubled Families).

(Councillors Brooks, Mrs Lees, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Warmington and D Wedderkopp all left the meeting at 9.08 pm. Councillor Tooze left the meeting at 9.17 pm. Councillors Mrs Baker and Mrs Floyd left the meeting at 9.43 pm and Councillors Mrs Messenger and Swaine at 9.45 pm.)

(The meeting ended at 9.48 pm.)