

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 10 December 2013 at 6.30 pm.

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

1. Nelson Mandela / Former Councillor Terry Murphy

The Mayor referred to the recent death of Nelson Mandela and asked how the Council might wish to remember him. A memorial garden in one of Taunton Deane's Parks was suggested.

The Mayor also announced the death of former Councillor Terry Murphy. Tributes were paid to Terry Murphy by several of the Councillors present.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 12 November 2013, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

3. Apologies

Councillors Bishop, Edwards, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gaines, Mrs Govier, Hayward, Ross and Mrs Warmington.

4. Declaration of Interests

Councillors Mrs Baker, Coles, A Govier, A Wedderkopp and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Henley declared personal interests both as a Member of Somerset County Council and as an employee of Job Centre Plus. Councillor Hunt declared personal interests both as a Member of Somerset County Council and in relation to Member pensions. Councillor Prior-Sankey declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council and a prejudicial interest in respect of the proposed redevelopment of dwellings at Bacon Drive, Taunton. She indicated that she would leave the meeting if any discussion on this topic took place. Councillors Mrs Hill and Stone declared personal interests as employees of Somerset County Council. Councillor T Slattery declared a personal interest as an employee of Sedgemoor District Council. Councillor Tooze declared a personal interest as an employee of the UK Hydrographic Office. Councillor Wren declared personal interests as an

employee of Natural England and as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. Councillor Nottrodt declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillors D Durdan and Stone declared prejudicial interests as Tone Leisure Board representatives. Councillor Gill Slattery declared personal interests as a member of the Board of Governors at Somerset College and as 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. Councillor D Reed declared a personal interest as a Director of the Taunton Town Centre Company. Councillor Miss James declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset College.

5. **Communications**

Councillor Gill Slattery referred to the recent production by a local school at The Brewhouse Theatre.

Somerset College had been approached by Taunton School to design and apply the make-up for its production of 'Cats'. The college students were given the commission as a design project and rose to the challenge of making up the 44 strong cast at each of the performances in the seven show run. The feedback received had been excellent and it had been a thoroughly enjoyable experience for all involved.

The Mayor responded by saying that the performance she had attended was 'beyond stunning' and offered her congratulations to all of the organisations involved.

6. **Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a proposal to support the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control.

Smoking was the single greatest cause of premature death and disease in Somerset, and the single largest factor in health inequalities. It was also a major driver of poverty. The move of public health to local government presented an opportunity for local authorities to lead local action to tackle smoking, and to ensure that the tobacco industry was not able to influence local tobacco control policy.

Every year in England more than 80,000 people died from smoking related diseases. This was more than the combined total of the next six causes of preventable deaths, including alcohol and drugs misuse.

The following facts were reported:-

- Reducing smoking in our communities significantly increased household incomes and benefited the local economy;
- Reducing smoking amongst the most disadvantaged in our communities was the single most important means of reducing health inequalities;

- Smoking was an addiction largely taken up by children and young people;
- The smoking epidemic - The tobacco industry needed to recruit 200,000 smokers a year in the United Kingdom (UK) to maintain current levels of consumption. The great majority of these new smokers would be under 18 years old;
- The illicit trade in tobacco funded the activities of organised criminal gangs and gave children access to cheap tobacco.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) was the World's first Public Health Treaty, negotiated through the World Health Organisation. It had been ratified by more than 170 countries, including the UK.

Key provisions included support for price and tax measures to reduce the demand for tobacco products; public protection from exposure to tobacco smoke; regulation of the contents of tobacco products; controlling tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship; measures to reduce tobacco dependence and promote cessation; tackling licit trade in tobacco products; and ending sales to children.

The FCTC was binding on all levels of Government, including Local Government. The national tobacco control plan aimed to cut the number of smokers by 210,000 every year.

Reported that the Somerset County Pension Fund, administered by the County Council through the Pensions Committee, invested in tobacco companies as part of its portfolio of investments. Approximately 1.4% of the fund was currently invested directly in tobacco stocks, amounting to some £19,200,000, producing around £800,000 per annum income.

In recent years there had been substantial investment in smoking cessation within the NHS, a service that was now commissioned by local authorities. The Government had also invested heavily in mass media campaigns to both reduce uptake and encourage cessation.

At its meeting on 26 September 2013, the Health and Wellbeing Board, agreed that it would be appropriate for improving public health in Somerset to divest from tobacco, and to ask the Pensions Committee to reconsider its investment policy accordingly. The Board also asked the District Councils to seek a review of the investment policy.

The Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control was a response to the enormous damage smoking did to local communities. It was a commitment to take action and a statement about a local authority's dedication to protecting local communities from the harm caused by smoking.

So far, the declaration had been signed by ten Councils including Somerset County Council, Swindon Borough Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council and Bristol City Council.

Although the FCTC was binding on Local Government, signing the Declaration and the actions that followed would raise awareness and thus

limit the likelihood of Taunton Deane Borough Council breaching UK Treaty obligations. Signing the Declaration would also show strong leadership on a key public health issue in the County.

The Pensions Committee had considered tobacco investments in the past, but not in the context of FCTC obligations. Given the conflicting objectives involved, it would be perverse not to ask the Pensions Committee to review its position in the light of the Council signing the Declaration.

Resolved that:-

- (i) The Government Declaration on Tobacco Control be signed by Taunton Deane Borough Council; and
- (ii) Somerset County Council's request to its Pensions Committee to reconsider its investment policy in relation to the tobacco industry be supported.

7. **Monkton Heathfield Capacity Funding**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the use of capacity support funding for the urban extension at Monkton Heathfield.

This development comprised a mixed use including 1,000 dwellings identified in the Taunton Deane Local Plan with a further 3,500 in the period up until 2026 allocated in the Core Strategy.

Whilst planning permission had been granted for the first phases and dwellings were now occupied, there remained considerable work and a number of issues that needed to be overcome. This was to ensure that delivery was provided at a rate that would make a substantial contribution to the Council's Housing land supply in years to come, as well as bringing forward much needed employment land.

Capacity support had therefore been sought from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to assist in unblocking potential hurdles to delivery.

In July 2013 the DCLG had made available up to £500,000 to the Council through the Large Sites Programme Capacity Fund. The initial payment of £300,000 had been received with the additional payment being received at the start of the next financial year on the basis that satisfactory progress had been made.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was monitoring the award and support was also being received from the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS).

Further reported that the Capacity Fund bid was based upon five work streams:-

- Specialist valuation advice to support negotiations with landowners and developers to deliver the Western Relief Road;
- Specialist legal and Compulsory Purchase advice to support negotiations with landowners and developers to deliver the Western Relief Road;
- Assessment of options for the design and alignment of the Western Relief Road and submission of a detailed planning application for the preferred option;
- Assessment by the Local Planning Authority of urban design and wider master planning issues (building on the work previously done by Urban Initiatives); and
- To retain specialist consultants to work with the Environment Agency and the developers to ensure that an appropriate and deliverable solution to providing replacement flood storage capacity and mitigating run off back to 'green field' was found.

As the award was not ring fenced, approval from Taunton Deane Members was required in order to spend this money in accordance with the various work streams identified.

Resolved that a supplementary estimate of £300,000 be approved, funded by the grant received from the Department of Communities and Local Government, which would allow the Large Sites Programme Capacity Fund award to be spent on progressing the five work streams identified above.

8. **Members' Allowances 2014/2015**

Submitted report previously circulated of the Members' Allowances Panel following its annual review of Members' Allowances. A copy of the report and recommendations had been circulated to all Councillors.

Details of the Members' Allowances Scheme that had been recommended by the independent Panel were submitted. The Panel had once again recommended increases to the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the two Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and had also recommended that a Special Responsibility Allowance be paid to the Chairman of the Standards Committee. The panel felt that the rate paid to carers of Councillor's dependents be increased from £6.19 per hour to £6.31 per hour.

In recognition of the improving economic conditions, the 1% pay award that had been made to Local Government employees from 1 April 2013 and the fact that Members' Allowances had remained static for the last five years the independent Panel further recommended a modest increase in the allowances for the forthcoming Financial Year.

The Panel also undertook to keep under review the situation relating to the proposal by the coalition Government to scrap Pensions for Councillors.

Moved by Councillor Mrs Hill and seconded by Councillor Mrs Allgrove, that the following be agreed:-

Summary of Recommendations

- A 1% increase to the Basic Allowance;
- A 1% increase to the Special Responsibility Allowances except that paid to the two Scrutiny Chairmen;
- A £300 increase in the Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Chairmen of the Community Scrutiny and Corporate Scrutiny Committees;
- A 1% increase in the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Allowances;
- To increase the rate paid to carers of Councillor's dependents from £6.19 per hour to £6.31 per hour, to reflect the National Minimum Wage; and
- No Special Responsibility Allowance to be paid to the Chairman of the Standards Committee.

The motion was put and was carried.

9. Recommendations to Council from the Executive

(a) Earmarked Reserves Review

As at 31 March 2013, the total of General Fund Revenue Earmarked Reserves was £6,517,000. This was equivalent to 48.8% of the Council's Net Revenue Budget, which was too high and needed to be reduced.

A fundamental review had therefore been undertaken of all General Fund Revenue Earmarked Reserves, which had involved each Reserve holder being interviewed and asked to provide evidence as to how the Reserve balance was planned to be used.

These interviews had identified that, of the £6,517,000 balance held as at 31 March 2013, all but £3,000,000 of the General Fund Revenue Earmarked Reserves were expected to be spent by 31 March 2014.

Of the £3,000,000 projected balance, it had been agreed with Reserve Holders that £498,100 would be returned to the General Fund Reserve immediately following Council's approval. This £498,100 included the following amounts over £10,000:-

- £250,000 – Self-Insurance Fund;
- £117,000 – Core Council Review – Property Services;
- £45,000 – Energy Efficiency Reserve;
- £25,000 – Stable Payroll Pension Reserve;
- £24,000 – Welfare and Finance Reform; and
- £12,000 – Healthy Workplace.

In addition to the above Earmarked Reserves being returned, the Council had recently received the Council's share of the trading surplus of the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP). This would increase the General Fund Reserve by £16,000.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) A budget return of £498,100 to the General Fund Reserve of balances currently held in Earmarked Reserves be agreed; and
- (2) A budget return of £16,000 to the General Fund Reserve, relating to the South West Audit Partnership trading surplus, be also agreed.

(b) Revised Capital Programme Budget Estimates 2013/2014 – 2017/2018

In February 2013, Full Council approved an interim capital programme pending a more fundamental review of Taunton Deane's capital spending priorities, including infrastructure requirements. This was felt appropriate to ensure the limited amount of funding available to the Council was targeted at the true priority areas.

A comprehensive review of the Council's capital spending needs had now been undertaken, taking into account growth agenda projects, the more traditional non growth capital projects and infrastructure needs that would not be met via the Community Infrastructure Levy regime. This had provided clarity as to what projects should and should not be progressed in light of the limited amount of funding available.

The Directors had reviewed and prioritised the entire list of capital schemes within the following categories:-

Priority	
1	Business Continuity (corporate/organisational)
2	Statutory Service Investment (to get to statutory minimum/ contractual/continuity)
3	Growth (Top 5)
4	Transformation
5	Others

In addition to the above prioritisation, the Directors had also proposed the general principle that schemes would only be supported if they were "invest to save".

The results of the prioritisation review were shown in the tables below. They showed the costs of the continuing non-growth schemes for both general schemes and Deane DLO schemes. For 2013/2014 these schemes had already been approved but there had been no approvals beyond this financial year.

Existing Continuing Non-Growth Schemes

	Annual £k	Priority				
		1	2	3	4	5
PC Refresh	60	30				
Members IT Equipment	4	4				
Waste Containers (3 years)	50		50			
Grants to Clubs	46					46
Play Equip Grants to Parishes	20					20
Play Equip - Replacement	20		20			
Disabled Facilities Grants	490		310			180
Enabling (affordable housing)	425					425
Taunton & Bridgwater Canal	10					10
Total	1,125	34	410	0	0	681

It was proposed that the Deane DLO schemes should be funded from DLO resources so they effectively became 'self-financing'.

Existing Continuing Non-Growth DLO Schemes

	Annual £k	Priority				
		1	2	3	4	5
DLO Vehicles	180		180			
DLO Plant and Equipment	23		23			
Total	203		203			

The following table showed the bids for new non-growth schemes. These spanned the next five years and included one off schemes and yearly schemes.

New Non-Growth Schemes

	£k	Priority				
		1	2	3	4	5
Wellington Cemetery	50					50
Taunton Cemetery	100					100
Crematorium Cabinet	15					15
Chapel Roof	180		180			
Private Housing - Landlord Accreditation / Loans etc	1,735					1,735
Private Housing - Category 1 Hazards	130					130
Website Development	30				30	
Cycle Path (Hankridge)	50					50

ICT Infrastructure	?	?				
Customer Access / Accommodation	?				?	
Deane House Improvements	?				?	
B Plan – Trans & Restructuring	?				?	
Gypsy Provision	?					?
West Somerset Project*						
DLO Relocation – subject to BC						
DLO Refurb – subject to BC						
Deane Helpline – subject to BC						
	2,290	0	180	0	30	2,080

Based on the above prioritisation exercise it was suggested that schemes within either Priority 1 or 2 should be funded. This meant that £180,000 of the £2,081,000 'general' available funding would be used leaving a remaining general funding balance of £1,901,000.

The Council received funding through Section 106 Agreements that had to be spent on Affordable Housing Schemes. Through the prioritisation, affordable housing had been allocated a Priority 5. Nevertheless, it was recommended that the principal should be agreed that any funding received for affordable housing should be spent on this.

The growth schemes were overall allocated a Priority 3. Within this priority group a number of potential investment needs had been considered and ranked in order to provide a steer on which schemes should be supported as funds became available. These schemes were set out in the following table:-

Growth Schemes

Project	Rank	14/15 £k	15/16 £k	16/17 £k	17/18+ £k	Total £k
Firepool Access	1	1,500	0	0	0	1,500
Firepool Infrastructure and Planning	2	0	3,500	0	0	3,500
Toneway Corridor Improvements (incl Creech Castle)	3	23,120	0	0	0	23,120
J25 Improvements	4	0	0	9,240	0	9,240
Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Work	5	0	0	0	15,000	15,000
Total		24,620	3,500	9,240	15,000	52,360

Having funded Priority 1 and 2 non-growth schemes, a balance of unallocated general funding of £1,901,000 and £519,000 of Growth Reserve existed.

It was reasonable to assume that the top growth scheme identified above could be progressed within existing funding streams. This would reduce the unallocated general funding to £920,000 and the Growth Reserve to £0.

If the prioritisation methodology was accepted, the Priority 1 and 2 schemes would be funded along with the affordable housing schemes and the top Growth Scheme. The additions to the capital programme and funding of additions would therefore be as shown in the table below:-

Planned additions to the Capital Programme

Project	14/15 £k	15/16 £k	Total £k
Chapel Roof	90	90	180
Affordable Housing (S106 / developer	450	174	624
Firepool Access	1,500	0	1,500
Total	2,040	264	2,304
Funded by:			
Capital Receipts	594	90	684
Growth Point Capital	157	0	157
Firepool Receipts	320	0	320
Growth and Regeneration Reserve (NHB)	519	0	519
Affordable Housing Receipts (S106/developer contributions)	450	174	624
Total	2,040	264	2,304

If the schemes proposed were approved, the remaining funding would be as shown in the table below:-

Remaining Funding

	Total £k	Funding Used £k	Remaining Total £k
General Fund			
<i>Affordable Housing</i>			
Affordable Housing Receipts (S106 / developer contributions)	624	(624)	0
<i>DLO</i>			
DLO Vehicle Sales	7	0	7
<i>Growth Funding</i>			
Growth and Regeneration Reserve (NHB)	519	(519)	0
<i>General Funding</i>			
Capital Reserve	393	0	393
Growth Point Grant	157	(157)	0
Capital Receipts	1,014	(684)	330
General Fund "non additional" RTB	197		197
Firepool Receipts	320	(320)	0
Sub Total: General Funding	2,081	(1,161)	920
TOTAL Remaining Funding	3,231	(2,304)	927

Following the decision of Full Council on 12 November 2013 to proceed with the West Somerset Project, the above total would be reduced by £800,000 to fund the likely transition costs involved. The above balance would therefore be reduced to £127,000.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Prioritisation Framework set out above be supported;
- (2) The Supplementary Budget in the General Fund Capital Programme of £2,304,000 to fund Priority 1 and 2 Non-Growth Schemes, funded Affordable Housing Schemes and the highest ranked Growth Scheme as set out above be approved; and
- (3) The principle that future external funding received specifically for affordable housing should be allocated to affordable housing projects in line with funding conditions and automatically added to the Capital Programme, be also approved.

(c) Fees and Charges 2014/2015

Consideration had been given to the proposed fees and charges for 2014/2015 for the following services:-

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

Details of the proposed increases were submitted. No increases were proposed to Land Charges fees, the fees for recovering Court Costs or in connection with Building Control and charging for Housing Act Notices and Immigration Visits.

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 2014/2015 in respect of the

Cemeteries and Crematorium, Waste Services, Housing, Licensing, Planning, Environmental Health and the Deane Helpline be agreed.

(d) Local Development Scheme 2013

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Localism Act 2011, required Local Planning Authorities to prepare a Local Development Scheme (LDS) and keep it updated.

The LDS was a rolling project management plan for the preparation of the planning policy documents that would direct future planning decisions in Taunton Deane.

Unlike previous versions of the LDS, the document was no longer required to be submitted to the Secretary of State for approval. It now had to be displayed on the Council's web site following a resolution by Full Council.

The Local Development Framework Steering Group had suggested that any future revisions to the LDS should be agreed by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation following consideration by the Steering Group, rather than taken back each time to Full Council.

On the motion of Councillor Edwards, it was

Resolved that:-

- (a) The latest version of the Local Development Scheme and timetable for the preparation of planning documents be adopted; and
- (b) Any future changes to the Local Development Scheme be agreed through the Local Development Framework Steering Group and Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation.

(e) Introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy in Taunton Deane – Examiner's Report and Adoption

Following consultation on the Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), a Draft Charging Schedule was prepared and submitted for independent Examination on 24 July 2013. The draft Instalment Policy was also put forward for comments at the Examination.

Subject to two suggested minor modifications, the Examiner had endorsed the Council's proposals for the levels of CIL within Taunton Deane and the zones within which they would apply.

Overall, the Examiner had concluded that the Council's proposed Charging Schedule provided an appropriate basis for the collection of the levy and the charges were set at a level which would not put the overall development of the area at risk.

It was important that systems were in place and functioning ahead of CIL implementation. It was therefore proposed to appoint a CIL Administration Officer early in 2014 for a two year period on the basis that the costs would be recouped from CIL receipts.

As the process of preparing to introduce CIL would take some time to implement it was proposed that CIL should be introduced in Taunton Deane with effect from 1 April 2014.

On the motion of Councillor Edwards, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy in Taunton Deane from 1 April 2014;
- (2) The Charging Schedule, set out in the report submitted to the Executive on 13 November 2013, which incorporated the modifications recommended by the Examiner; and
- (3) The proposed Instalment Policy which was also set out in the Executive's Report,

all be approved.

(f) Review of Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/2015

Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was abolished on 1 April 2013 and replaced with a locally designed "Council Tax Support" (CTS) scheme.

Only 90% of funding previously granted for CTB was given for localised CTS. However, those of pensionable age were protected from any reduction in support, so cuts could only be applied to people of working age.

Full Council had previously adopted the CTS scheme only for the 2013/2014 financial year so consideration needed to be given to the scheme for the next financial year.

Central Government had stated that localised CTS funding would be unchanged in cash terms from its 2014/2015 total level. However funding for localised CTS had been incorporated in the total Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) and this had not been separately identified.

Indicative figures had shown that the LGFS would be reduced not only in 2014/2015 but in future years too. Therefore, it was possible Councillors might wish to consider applying cuts to localised CTS spending.

A decision not to change the money paid out by CTS would leave a greater cut in the remaining LGFS. A decision to decrease the money paid out by CTS by the same proportion the LGFS had been reduced could mean significant cuts in CTS available to working age recipients.

In 2012/2013, CTB of £3,540,000 was paid to working age recipients. From 1 April 2013, CTS for this group reduced to £2,710,000 - a cut of approximately 23%. Cutting CTS in 2015/2016 as proposed would reduce help available to working age

recipients to £1,830,000. This equates to a cut of 48% in comparison to help previously available through CTB in 2012/2013.

Such a reduction in support would impact upon working age people already affected by significant cuts through Welfare Reform, for example the overall Benefit Cap and removal of the spare room subsidy. In such circumstances the Council did have a means of providing some discretionary assistance.

The funding for CTS within the 2013/2014 LGFS included a proportion relating to parishes and Special Expenses. The Council had previously decided to pass on a proportion of this funding to parishes to reflect their reduction in funding as a result of CTS.

The Funding Settlement for 2014/2015 and beyond would not separately identify the proportion of funding for CTS for any preceptors. The Council therefore needed to determine the policy for providing any CTS Grant funding to parishes for 2014/2015. There were two options open to the Council:-

Option 1: Use the same formula that was used for 2013/2014, so each parish grant for CTS will be calculated as CTS Tax Base Adjustment x 2012/2013 Parish Band D Tax rate; and

Option 2: Use the same formula that was used for 2013/2014, but apply the same reduction to parish grant funding as that experienced by Taunton Deane in the Funding Settlement.

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

Resolved that:-

- (a) The current Council Tax Support Scheme be continued from 1 April 2014;
- (b) Option 1 be the preferred route in providing and calculating Council Tax Support Grant funding for Parish Councils in 2014/2015; and
- (c) The Council continued to provide discretionary help through the Discretionary Council Tax Assistance Policy to give extra short-term help towards Council Tax costs for those in hardship.

(g) Customer Access Strategy

The existing Customer Access Strategy had been prepared in 2005. It now needed to be updated in the light of social and technological changes and the Council's current financial position. The updated Strategy proposed a significant shift towards self service and the use of technology for the majority of enquiries, whilst focusing resources for face to face provision on those with the most complex requirements.

It was vital for the Council as it moved forward with less resource at its disposal that technology was used wherever possible to provide access to services. For many this would be an improvement on the current situation as it would enable access to key services on a 24/7 basis.

The Council had already identified that it had to make suitable provision for those who did not have access to technology or had special needs.

This change could not be made without cost and a Business Case had been

included within the Strategy for the investment that would be required which included:-

- The provision of a new, fit for purpose web site to provide full authenticated access to end to end transactional services using mobile devices;
- The ability for staff to access and deliver services whilst visiting key sites within the community;
- The provision of access points enabling customers to either self serve or interact with a member of staff to receive Council services; and
- The provision of all applicable Council data sets in an open data format.

The total cost of these items was estimated as £320,000 one off investment plus a continuing charge of £40,000 per annum.

There was the requirement for each service, to implement a 'channel shift' process – moving its way of operating wherever possible to self service. This would involve further cost and it was suggested that £50,000 should be allocated as a corporate resource to help support this work.

The total investment requirement was therefore £370,000. However, £190,000 of these costs would be covered within the joint services approach with West Somerset Council. Therefore, the Council would only need to find the balance of £180,000.

As approximately 20% of current customer contact costs were currently funded from the Housing Revenue Account, it was proposed that 20% of the £180,000 (£36,000) should continue to be funded from the same source.

One of the main purposes of implementing channel shift was to make financial savings for the Council. With this in mind it was estimated that a shift of 25% of both footfall numbers and telephone access numbers to web access and using the Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) approximate costs per transaction would bring an indicative saving to the Council of approximately £241,000 per annum.

This 25% shift was conservative and a higher shift could be achieved dependant on how robust the Council wished to be. In order to realise the savings as 'cashable', the Council would need to reduce staff costs as a result of the time saved and potentially seek to reduce its costs with Southwest One.

With only a 25% shift, the payback on the one off investment of £180,000 would be made within one year with a continuing saving of over £200,000 in the years following if all the savings accrued to the Council or, based on a 50/50 split with Southwest One, one and a half years payback with a saving in the region of £80,000 per annum (taking into account the extra £40,000 continuing revenue cost).

In order for the Council to better meet the needs of its residents, to use its resources in a more focused way and to achieve the predicted savings, there was a need to adopt the strategy of moving to digital service delivery

wherever possible.

If approved, a detailed Implementation Plan would be drawn up by the end of the year to be implemented during 2015.

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

Resolved that

- (1) The revised Customer Access Strategy be adopted; and
- (2) The release of £144,000 from General Fund Reserves and £36,000 from the Housing Revenue Account be agreed to enable the Strategy to be implemented. This would include £50,000 to be allocated to revenue costs and £130,000 to be added to the Capital Programme, funded from revenue resources.

(h) Asset Strategy

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

The Peer Review undertaken during 2012 identified the need for the Council to make better use of its Property assets.

At the beginning of the year the Executive adopted a new Asset Management Plan (AMP) but this was subject to a more detailed and strategic review of the Council's approach to asset management being undertaken.

Following a procurement exercise, Bob Baber Associates were appointed in August 2013 to develop the new Asset Strategy and Decision Making Framework.

The objective of the review was to develop a new Asset Strategy, which maximised the return from Taunton Deane's assets and which provided a clear decision making framework for future property asset decisions.

Specifically the new Asset Strategy and decision making framework would:-

- (i) Ensure the Council made best use of property assets to deliver our 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.

The development of the Strategy had involved a two stage approach to collect and analyse information from documents and feedback obtained from key stakeholders and Members.

The research undertaken to inform the new Strategy had identified a number of key issues which were summarised below:-

- The acute financial pressures on the Council to which the property portfolio would need to respond;
- The need for improvement in property data, especially financial data, to enable fact based decision making;
- A potential lack of capacity to implement the Asset Strategy;
- A need to re-organise the way property was strategically managed and strategic property recommendations and decisions were made in the Council;
- The need for a more rigorous analysis of the reasons for holding property;
- The need for a more rigorous analysis of the degree to which each property contributed to the Council's objectives; and
- The need for a rapid and systematic review of all the Council's property to make the property portfolio more sustainable, to make it more focused on the Council's priorities and to reduce net revenue expenditure.

The Council's gross spend on General Fund assets was in excess of £1,500,000 per annum. Consequently even a conservative savings target of 10% could yield minimum savings of £150,000 per annum.

The delivery of some of these savings were already being progressed through the implementation of projects such as the Customer Access and Accommodation Projects. However, to maximise the potential savings a rigorous and continuing review process across all of the Council's assets was required.

The Strategy development process had identified some fundamental areas where improvements were essential. Key amongst these were:-

- (i) Council assets managed strategically and ideally by a single Property Team;
- (ii) Adequate, appropriately skilled resource to implement the Strategy; and
- (iii) Detailed cost and income data on an asset by asset basis to enable the prioritisation of assets for review and to facilitate accurate, fact based decision making.

The creation of a single Property Team was in progress following the decisions in connection with the West Somerset Project. However, it was important to understand that implementing the Strategy would require additional staff resource and expertise, compared with the current situation.

Additionally, it was vital that action was taken now to provide for the provision of accurate property cost and income data in the future.

Consequently, the Executive was of the view that £90,000 from General Fund Reserves should be set aside to fund an additional specialist Estates Surveyor for a period of two years.

On the motion of Councillor Cavill, it was

Resolved that:-

- (a) The new Asset Strategy and Decision Making Framework – to incorporate the revised wording agreed by the Executive – be approved; and
- (b) £90,000 be allocated from General Fund Reserves to fund an additional specialist Estates Surveyor for a period of two years.

10. **Business requiring to be considered as a matter of urgency**

The Mayor certified that the item of business covered by Minute No.11 below was urgent and required a decision before the next scheduled meeting of the Council.

11. **Proposed Exemption from the Treasury Management Strategy Statement**

Each year the Council approved the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS).

The existing TMSS (covering 2013/2014) was in the process of being refreshed and would be presented to Members for consideration after Christmas. The existing parameters for investment and borrowing (type / maturity limit / portfolio limit) were being fundamentally reviewed to reflect the shifting financial risks in the economy and banking industry.

Reported that the Council had been presented with an opportunity to invest with another local authority at a rate which was favourable to that which could currently be achieved on the money market.

The existing TMSS gave the authority to invest with other local authorities – as long as the deal was for no more than 30% of the overall investment portfolio and the maturity period was no longer than five years.

The opportunity available was to invest £2,500,000 for a period of 16-17 years at a rate of 3.9% (60 basis points above 15 year gilt rates). The local authority was looking to borrow £7,500,000 in total, from various other local authority sources.

The issue was not the level of investment, but the maturity date. The risks around this longer term investment were mitigated by having a break clause opportunity in the deal every six months.

In the view of the Section 151 Officer, the indicative financial advantage to our revenue budget was potentially an additional £80,000 of investment income per annum. Should the investment market change significantly the Council could exercise the break clause and invest elsewhere.

Resolved that the exemption sought from the 2013/2014 Treasury Management Strategy Statement to allow the investment transaction set out above to proceed be approved.

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

(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- Taunton Town Centre Rethink;
- Shared Management and Services with West Somerset Council (WSC);
- The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre;
- Economic Growth Prospectus for Taunton;
- Taunton Town Centre Fun Day and Lights Switch On;
- Budget Setting;
- Employment Land at Bathpool; and
- National Citizens Service Graduation Ceremony.

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

No report.

(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;
- Affordable Housing Target;
- Council House Building;
- Estates Management – Welfare Reform;
- Estates Management – Rent Arrears; and
- Estates Management - Voids.

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

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

- Corporate and Client Services;

- Corporate Health and Safety;
- Corporate Performance;
- Customer Contact Centre;
- 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:-

- Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan (SADMP);
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA);
- Authorities Monitoring Report;
- Routes to the River Tone;
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans;
- Communications; and
- Car Parking.

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

Councillor Mrs Warmington presented the Community Leadership report which focused on the Efficient and Effective Delivery of Services with Better Outcomes.

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

The report from Councillor Cavill covered:-

- Business Support and Networking;
- Business Grants;
- Taunton Town Centre Company and BID (Business Improvement District);
- The Brewhouse Theatre;
- Taunton Growth Prospectus;
- Small Business Saturday;
- Jobs Clubs;
- Business Advice Workshops;
- Land for Business Investment;
- Regeneration and Development; and
- Taunton Tourist Information, Ticket and Travel Centre Update.

(Councillor Mrs Waymouth declared a personal interest as a Governor of Taunton School during the discussion of Councillor Cavill's report to Council.)

(Councillors Mrs Baker, Henley, Meikle, Mrs Messenger and D Wedderkopp all left

the meeting at 8.51 pm. Councillors A Govier, Hall and C Hill left the meeting at 8.55 pm. Councillors D Reed, Mrs Reed, Gill Slattery, Stone, Swaine and Wren left the meeting at 8.57 pm. Councillor Morrell left the meeting at 9.09 pm and Councillor Mrs Herbert left at 9.21 pm.)

(The meeting ended at 9.27 pm.)