

## **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 19 August 2014 at 6.30 p.m.

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

### **1. Apologies**

Councillors Mrs Adkins, Farbahi and Ross.

### **2. Declaration of Interests**

Councillors Mrs Baker, Coles, Prior-Sankey, A Wedderkopp and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Henley declared personal interests 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 as one of the Council's representatives on the Somerset Waste Board. Councillor Mrs Hill declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor Tooze declared a personal interest as an employee of the UK Hydrographic Office. Councillor Wren declared a personal interest 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, a Patron of the Supporters of Taunton Women's Aid and as one of the Council's representatives on the Parrett Internal Drainage Board. Councillor Swaine declared a personal interest as a part-time swimming instructor. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as a local owner of land in Taunton Deane. Councillor Mrs Herbert declared a personal interest as an employee of Job Centre Plus. Councillor Ms Lisgo declared a personal interest as a Director of Tone FM.

### **3. Communications**

Councillor Williams reported that he had recently received an email with a link to an article in a national newspaper regarding 'Britain's 20 friendliest places

to live'. According to a survey conducted by a comparison website in relation to the British property market, Taunton was number three on the list.

Councillor Williams read from the article which stated:- *“You don’t have to be tanked up with the local cider to appreciate the friendliness of Taunton and the people who live there. The County Cricket Ground, beloved of West Country sports fans, is legendary for its relaxed good humour. An abundance of independent shops and businesses in the town centre reveals an idiosyncratic community brimming with optimism. There are plenty of charming Victorian terraces in town and picturesque country cottages nearby.”*

#### 4. **Financial Outturn 2013/2014 - Recommendation to Council from the Executive**

Following the decision made by Full Council on 22 July 2014 to which the ‘six month’ rule applied, a motion in accordance with Standing Order 23 (1) (b) had been received seeking rescindment of the part of the decision as to the proposed use of the General Fund (GF) Revenue 2013/2014 underspend.

The GF Revenue Outturn for 2013/2014 was a Net Expenditure position of £13,453,000, which was a £964,000 (6.7%) underspend against the Final Net Budget for the year. This was largely due to above forecast income levels in parking, planning, burials/cremations - as well as cost reductions in the final months of the year.

The following proposals were those the Executive wished to recommend for approval which would allocate £418,000 of the underspend or additional budget approvals for 2014/2015:-

#### ***Supplementary Requests of Underspend 2013/2014***

<b>Bid Description</b>	<b>Bid (£'000)</b>
Development of IT Strategy For TDBC	50
Cemetery Extension – Taunton	121
Grass Cutting	50
Weed Spraying	10
Street Cleansing	42
Car Park Improvements	125
Capital Grants for Parish Play Equipment/Sports Halls/Clubs	20
<b>TOTAL requested for approval</b>	<b>418</b>

Moved by Councillor Coles, seconded by Councillor Prior-Sankey, that an additional £20,000 be allocated to enable Capital Grants to be provided for Play Equipment, Sports Halls and Clubs in the Taunton Unparished Area.

The amendment was put and was carried.

Moved by Councillor Coles, seconded by Councillor Prior-Sankey, that a sum of £300,000 be set aside from the Reserves towards meeting any essential

payments towards the maintenance of The Deane House whilst the outcome of the Local Government Elections in May 2015 was awaited.

The amendment was put and was lost.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was:-

**Resolved that:-**

General Fund Supplementary Estimates in 2014/2015 in the following areas, utilising 2013/2014 underspends, be supported and that the following be approved:-

- i. £50,000 to fund an IT Strategy for the Council in 2014/2015;
- ii. £121,000 to be added to the General Fund Capital Programme for 2014/2015 to fund the Taunton Cemetery extension, funded by a Revenue Contribution to Capital outlay (RCCO);
- iii. £50,000 to fund additional grass cuttings in 2014/2015;
- iv. £10,000 to fund additional weed spraying in 2014/2015;
- v. £42,100 to fund Street Cleansing works in 2014/2015;
- vi. £125,000 be added to the General Fund Capital Programme for 2014/2015 to fund Car Park improvements, funded by a RCCO;
- vii. £20,000 be added to the General Fund Capital Programme for 2014/2015 to fund Play Equipment grants in 2014/2015, funded by a RCCO; and
- viii. £20,000 be allocated to enable Capital Grants to be provided for Play Equipment, Sports Halls and Clubs in the Taunton Unparished Area.

## **5. Council Accommodation - Recommendation to Council from the Executive**

Following the decision made by Full Council on 22 July 2014 to which the 'six month' rule applied, a motion in accordance with Standing Order 23 (1) (b) had been received seeking rescindment of the decision concerning the future of the Council's Office Accommodation.

Following an options appraisal exercise in December 2013, the two options which had been under consideration over the past six months were a new build at Firepool, Taunton and a move to County Hall.

The Deane House had been built in 1987 and had seen little refurbishment since then. The building now needed significant investment.

The Council also had the challenge of meeting an unprecedented budgetary challenge and was considering all ways of cutting overhead costs in order to safeguard investment in front line services.

The review that had been undertaken had focused on the future of the Council's main office base and had looked at options for this. Whilst a detailed financial and qualitative evaluation of the two options had been undertaken, the Council had to be mindful of a number of key factors.

The Deane House cost around £650,000 per annum to occupy and staying at this location would involve significant additional costs although, in any event, the building was too large for the Councils current requirements.

A full Condition Survey had been carried out on the building and it was likely that in the region of £3,000,000 would need to be spent during the course of the next 2-5 years to make it fit for purpose.

Other organisations which had chosen to rationalise their office accommodation had at the same time incorporated new ways of working such as "Smart Office".

The evaluation of the Council's accommodation needs had included a range of qualitative criteria, including the importance of a flexible accommodation solution. In addition, the evaluation had focussed on a "best assessment" of the accommodation needs for the Council as currently understood.

During the second half of 2013 an internal review and high level option appraisal had been undertaken culminating in the property consultancy DTZ being appointed to undertake the detailed feasibility study of the two preferred options of either moving to County Hall or a new build at Firepool.

The appraisal process had brought together two areas of analysis - financial and non-financial. The following was the outcome of the Overall Value for Money assessment:-

	60%	40%	100%	
	Financial Scoring	Qualitative Scoring	Total Combined Scoring	VFM Ranking
DH SQ+	48.67	95.15	67.26	4
SCC 25- Year Lease	97.68	100.00	98.61	1
Firepool LL	73.46	98.79	83.59	2
Firepool 25 Year Lease	76.09	68.48	73.05	3

The above exercise had concluded that an accommodation solution at County Hall was the best overall Value for Money Option. A Virtual Freehold at Firepool ranked in second place and remaining in occupation at The Deane House and investing in the building fabric and services, ranked in last place.

Both the main options under consideration had assumed the subsequent disposal of The Deane House and the wider site. However, there was now a clear commitment to reinvest the amount of any receipt obtained for The Deane House and site in an income generating investment.

Any agreement to move to either County Hall or Firepool would involve many substantial next steps and tasks to implement and would require significant resource.

Some cost estimates had been acquired to support the project via external project management support and other professional services. These would be subject to further negotiation and suitable scrutiny via procurement. The anticipated third party costs to see the project through to completion in 2017 were in the region of £250,000. This figure included the costs associated with the disposal of The Deane House site too.

On the motion of Councillor Cavill, it was

**Resolved that:-**

- (1) It be agreed that the Council's preferred option for its future main office accommodation, reception and Member debating space was at County Hall, Taunton subject to Somerset County Council confirming its intent to develop the site and the agreement of Heads of Terms, detailed commercial negotiations and design;
- (2) Delegated authority be provided to the Director of Housing and Communities to progress this project in consultation with a cross party working group including the Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Shadow Portfolio Holder. At all stages, key decisions would be brought back to Full Council for determination;
- (3) A Supplementary Estimate of £250,000 for project related costs be approved, funded by £210,000 (84%) from General Fund (GF) Reserves and £40,000 (16%) from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Reserves based on the current level of usage of The Deane House by GF and HRA services;
- (4) Approval be granted to initiate steps to facilitate either the disposal of The Deane House site on the most favourable terms or entering into a regeneration project which would enable retention of the site and derived benefit to the Council; and
- (5) Subject to (4) above, a suitable investment be made in an income deriving asset of equivalent value to the receipt derived from The Deane House site disposal.

(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.)