

## 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 9 December 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, Bowrah, Cavill, Coles, Denington, Edwards, Farbahi, Gaines, A Govier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Mrs Herbert, C Hill, Horsley, Hunt, Miss James, R Lees, Ms Lisgo, Meikle, Morrell, Nottrodt, Ms Palmer, Prior-Sankey, D Reed, Mrs Reed, Ross, Gill Slattery, T Slattery, Miss Smith, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stone, Mrs Warmington, Watson, Ms Webber, A Wedderkopp, D Wedderkopp, Williams and Wren

### 1. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 30 September 2014, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

### 2. Apologies

Councillors Bishop, Mrs Floyd, Mrs Gaden, Mrs Govier, Mrs Lees and Tooze.

### 3. Declaration of Interests

Councillors Mrs Baker, Coles, A Govier, 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 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 the Department of Work and Pensions. Councillor Ms Lisgo declared a personal interest as a Director of Tone FM.

#### 4. **Public Question Time**

- (1) Mr David Orr explained that he wanted to aid the protection of the reputation of the Councillors and the Council.

The 2011 Localism Act was based upon a set of principles, two of which were openness and accountability. He was pleased that the Council had now finally complied with the requirements of the Act to web publish the register of interests.

Mr Orr stated that he had no problem with Councillors running businesses and earning their living within Taunton Deane. However, there was a 'grey' area with this relating to the opportunity for Councillors to gain business from sub-contract work from a primary contract awarded by the Council and not declaring it in the Register of Interests.

The Guidance Notes clearly stated that Councillors must avoid ever placing themselves "under any obligation" as a result of a declarable interest.

The advice he had previously received from the Monitoring Officer was that simply declaring your trade, profession or business is sufficient and that any sub-contract from a Taunton Deane primary contract was said to be a "third party contract". This appeared to be at odds with other enquiries made of other Local Authorities.

Surely, once a sub-contract from a Council-awarded contract paid fees or earnings to the trade, profession or business of a serving Councillor, then an obligation had been created?

Breaking the Localism Act was a criminal offence as the former leader of Dorset County Council had recently found out, and this was surely a wake-up call for all Councils?

To maintain public confidence and in support of the Localism Act principles of accountability and openness, Mr Orr called upon the Council to conduct a formal Standards Committee review into the proper recording of sub-contract work awarded from Taunton Deane primary contracts into the Register of Interests.

In response, Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams stated that this issue would be discussed at a forthcoming meeting of the Somerset Monitoring Officers. If any further guidance needed to be issued to Taunton Deane's Councillors as a result of this consideration, this would be done.

- (2) Questions relating to proposed development at Jurston Farm, Wellington

- (a) Ann Loarridge expressed concerns over the additional education provision proposed. She felt this was going to be inadequate and asked where all the children who would live on the new development would be taught? There appeared to be land allocated for a new primary school but this site looked to be quite restricted. Where would

the children play? How safe would it be for the children to travel to school?

- (b) Michael Lockyer felt that the 2,000 new houses that were being built in Wellington – including at Jurston Farm – would generate up to 3,000 potential employees. Where were the jobs locally going to be created? Westpark was only a medium-sized employment site. Did this mean Wellington was destined to be a ‘dormitory town’?
- (c) Frank Cross stated that there appeared to be a rush to develop Jurston. Care needed to be taken to ensure that everything promised was capable of being delivered. The principal reason for developing the land at Longforth Farm, namely the bridge over the railway, had been ‘left behind’. Would it ever be built? Local residents would have to suffer heavy lorries coming through the town centre for some time yet.
- (d) Michael Hearn said the new road to be built as part of the development which ran parallel with Laburnum Road would be at a higher level and could result in nearby flooding. The new houses which would be ‘packed together’ would overlook existing dwellings invading privacy and violating the right to light. Wellington would be grid-locked if the development was to proceed.
- (e) Shaun Nightingill made reference to the 2012 Plan for Wellington which had talked about an extension to the sewage works that had not yet been implemented and the former Doctor’s Surgery at Bulford being used for retail purposes only. This site had since been developed as retirement flats. He used these examples to show that development proposals often did not turn out as expected. He added that between 2008 and 2012 there had been an over-delivery of 400 houses in Wellington. Surely the town had already carried its fair share of development?
- (f) Russell Loarridge submitted a petition signed by many local residents against the proposed development at Jurston Farm. He thought that Wellington residents had ‘slept-walked’ through 1,200 new dwellings being built in the town already with a further 650 dwellings proposed at Jurston Farm. The professionals had not taken into account the lack of school places and medical facilities for new residents. He added that Wellington’s population had increased by 40% - 20,000 people in less than 20 years. Was there a need to re-consider whether a further increase was the right thing to do?

In response, Councillor Edwards thanked those members of the public from Wellington for attending the meeting. He understood the strength of feeling and stated that he would be happy to come to Wellington to discuss their concerns further. Now that a planning application had been submitted to develop the land at Jurston Farm, Councillor Edwards said he had to be very cautious about attempting to reply to any of the specific points raised. He reminded those present that representations in connection with the application could be submitted as part of the planning process during the formal

consultation period – which had been extended to take account of the forthcoming Christmas period.

## 5. **Receipt of Petition – Legal Highs**

Councillor Coles presented to the Mayor a petition containing over 200 signatures calling for both the local Council and the Government to ban the selling of all Psychoactive Substances (known as ‘Legal Highs’). Due to the size of the petition, Councillor Coles had requested a 15 minute debate which was permitted under the Council’s Petitions Scheme.

Councillor Coles felt the Council needed to be at the vanguard to support the Police in implementing new legislation aimed at controlling access to Legal Highs. The current cost to society was enormous with many deaths across the country being recorded and lots of complaints from the public in relation to this issue. The help of the South West Action Group (SWAG) in highlighting the serious problem that existed with Legal Highs was acknowledged.

Mr Zac Smith representing SWAG reported that of the two shops that were selling Legal Highs in Taunton, the one in East Reach had stopped doing so and the one on The Bridge had been temporarily ‘shut down’ by the Police using the new powers that had only recently come into effect.

During the remainder of the debate the Members who spoke fully supported the aims of the petition.

## 6. **Motion – Legal Highs**

Moved by Councillor Miss Smith, seconded by Councillor Coles

“This Council recognises that there has been an impact on the community and welfare of our residents through the ongoing sale of NPS (Legal Highs) within Taunton Deane. We recognise that the South West Action Group has played an important part in bringing the negative impact of these to our attention. We have a duty to remedy this situation through restricting the sale of these substances along with assisting those affected.

- Stop the over the counter sales of NPS (Legal Highs) in Taunton Deane owned premises by a restrictive covenant. This covenant should forbid the sale/distribution of NPS in premises owned or leased by the Council. We also need to contact all local/national commercial landlords within Taunton Deane to ask them to include a covenant in all new lettings within the area.
- Call on the Council to immediately make use of new powers available under Anti-Social Behavioural (ASB) legislation which includes ensuring that a community trigger is put in place by the end of December 2014.
- Ensure that a multi-agency team with the Police, NHS and other third parties meets on a regular basis to discuss ASB within the town and look to make remedies.

- Taunton Deane to fund a new post for a full time cleaning operative, building on the December trial, with a brief of assisting in the collection of reported needles, cleaning known hotspots on a daily basis and additional cleaning of our public toilets and park areas.
- Taunton Deane to fund specialist help provision to the maximum of £25,000 per annum to support users in looking to break the addiction through Taunton Association for the Homeless, Citizens Advice Bureau, Turning Point and others.
- Work with Somerset County Council to ensure the introduction of an educational programme for schools, colleges and youth provision providers to ensure impacts and dangers of Legal Highs are addressed.”

The motion was put and was carried.

## 7. **Motion – Christmas Lights in Taunton**

Moved by Councillor Horsley, seconded by Councillor Farbahi

“Taunton Deane Borough Council has a proud record of supporting its town centre and has always acknowledged the importance of the Christmas period in providing the retailers with the best opportunity of being commercially successful in the calendar year. In recent years it has expanded the customer offer by extending its reach to Somerset Square, Castle Green and further up the High Street with its renting of stalls to market holders on those days when it puts on events for the traders such as the Christmas Lights switch on.

It further acknowledges the role played by the Events Organisers which has raised money towards the lights and ensuring that all visitors are welcome. It notes that the figures provided by the Economic Development Team and by the Manager of the Orchard Centre also show a year on year increase in numbers in the town centre. Taunton can be also proud that its current level of void sites is down to 4% compared with the national average of 14%.

It is disappointing to note however that for the past two years the extent of the Christmas Lights only reach nearly as far as Debenhams to the north on North Street and to well short of Primark on East Street and does not include much of High Street to the south. This means that Bridge Street and Station Road to the north, the eastern part of East Street and the whole of East Reach has no Christmas Lights nor does Corporation Street to the West. These important secondary shopping areas are getting no benefit from the Christmas Lights “project”.

Business Rates have not come down in the recession whilst market rents have halved for even the premium sites. This has led to a high volume of appeals against the Rateable Values by many owners in their attempts to reduce their outgoings. The future of Christmas Lights is going to remain a “will we, won’t we” battle every year which only creates uncertainty for the retailers and traders

Taunton Deane Liberal Democrats note that the recent Traders Survey identified that 77% of the traders believe that Christmas Lights should be “safeguarded”. They also believe that with the demise of the Town Centre Company, the responsibility for supporting a fair and longer lasting strategy for making Taunton Sparkle is for the Council to agree to (a) extend the Christmas lights to the secondary areas mentioned above and (b) to agree to provide funding until Christmas 2018.

Accordingly it asks the DLO or other such organisation to cost out a programme to cover the extended area for 2015 onwards and to examine whether to hire or purchase. The funding for this should come from any under spend in the previous year.”

The motion was put and was carried.

## 8. **Hinkley Point C (HPC): Housing Funding Strategy**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Hinkley Point C (HPC): Housing Funding Strategy.

HPC, in accordance with the provision of the Section 106 Development Consent Order (DCO), was due to release a housing fund of £660,824 to assist in delivering additional housing capacity, in order to mitigate potential adverse effects on the local private rented and accordingly, the low cost housing market.

It was estimated that by early 2016, there would be a need for 1,350 beds across all tenures and across Taunton Deane, West Somerset and Sedgemoor, and that this need would increase to 2,200 by early 2019.

The Housing Funding Strategy had been developed in close partnership with Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) and West Somerset District Council (WSC). The initial principles and general shape of the utilisation of the Housing Fund had been agreed and were a range of inter-dependent initiatives, designed to help alleviate pressures on the local housing markets.

It was envisaged that the initiatives listed below would help respond to the impacts felt, however the Council would monitor the market closely to see whether future additional funding bids would be needed:-

- a) **Somerset Homelet** - seeking to understand and assist in moderating the supply and demand through the online resource of Somerset Homelet;
- b) **Flexible Rent Support** - providing support for the most vulnerable trying to access the private rented sector;
- c) **Landlord Accreditation** - ensuring that a section of current private rented sector accommodation, including rooms, were of a good standard through minor works that were supported by grant monies;
- d) **Sustainable Management Service** - commission a sustainable management service that would provide accommodation for the most vulnerable;

- e) **Tenant Accreditation** - providing support to tenants to help them demonstrate they were responsible to landlords;
- f) **Empty Property Regeneration**- utilising empty properties that would be brought back into use for the most vulnerable; and
- g) **First Time Buyers Loan** - assisting first time buyers to purchase their own homes through Wessex Home Improvement Loans

The projects had been developed in partnership and their implementation would be co-ordinated by a Housing Implementation Officer (HIO). The projects would then be delivered by both internal and external services such as Housing Options, Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) and many others.

As well as the sum mentioned above, there was the opportunity for a further £5,000,000 to be shared amongst North Somerset, Taunton Deane, Sedgemoor and West Somerset from the Housing Fund Contingency Payments should it be evident from the private rented sector that thresholds had been exceeded by unanticipated demand from the HPC workforce for accommodation and/or unanticipated impacts on the housing supply.

**Resolved** that the approach of the 'Hinkley Point C: Housing Funding Strategy' so as to simplify approvals to be obtained from West Somerset Cabinet and Full Council when the monies were released, be endorsed.

## 9. **Proposed Social Media Policy and Recording of Meetings Protocol**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed adoption of a Social Media Policy and a Recording of Meetings Protocol.

The Council already operated within a world where the use of Social Media was growing and becoming an increasingly significant way of communicating with individuals and organisations.

The Council used a Twitter account as did some individual Councillors and staff and, going forward, this trend was likely to be on the increase as Social Media continued to evolve.

Against this background the South West Audit Partnership had recommended that the Councils should have an approved Social Media Policy to provide guidance for Councillors and staff and minimise the risk of exposing Taunton Deane to reputational damage.

Reported that a Social Media Policy had now been drafted. If this Policy was adopted, Guidelines as to how to use Social Media effectively together with an easy to read summary policy document would be produced to assist both Councillors and employees to operate safely within the policy requirements.

On a related matter, the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 had made it a requirement for Councils to allow any member of the public to take photographs, film and audio record the proceedings, and report on all public meetings.

In the light of these developments the Somerset Monitoring Officers' Group had prepared a draft Protocol which was to be considered for adoption by all the Local Authorities in Somerset.

When this matter was discussed by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee it was recommended that all public meetings should be recorded with effect from 1 January 2015 and were made available to the public via the internet or through whatever other appropriate means.

It was proposed to achieve this by the purchase of a small recording device which would be compatible with the new microphone loop system due to be installed shortly in the John Meikle Room.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee had also requested investigations into upgrading the recording to a full visual one for all meetings for streaming later in 2015 together with appropriate training for Members.

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The Social Media Policy be adopted;
- (2) The Recording of Meetings Protocol be also adopted;
- (3) The introduction of audio recording of all Council and Committee meetings which were open to the press and public to coincide with the installation of the new microphone system be supported; and
- (4) The request by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to investigate the practicalities and costs of introducing the visual recording of meetings be noted and the Committee's request for training to be provided for Members in relation to the Recording of Meetings Protocol and the use of Social Media be supported.

10. **Joint Independent Remuneration Panel – Process to Review Members' Allowances**

Reference Minute No 9 from the meeting held on 30 September 2014, reported that following further deliberations, the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel now comprised Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, West Somerset Council and Mendip District Council.

Details of the full membership of the proposed Panel was submitted for the information of Members.

Given the impending May 2015 elections, it was important that there was clarity in terms of a process and timetable for reviewing the Members' Allowance Scheme.

The Joint Independent Remuneration Panel met on 27 November 2014 and had recommended to the constituent partners that the process for the formal review of the Members' Allowances Scheme should be as follows:-



- (a) To continue to apply the existing scheme for the first part of the 2015/2016 financial year, pending the adoption of a revised scheme of Members' Allowances following the Borough Council Elections in May 2015.
- (b) To recommend to the Council to be elected in May 2015 that the budget for Members' Allowances for 2015/2016 to fund the new scheme following the election was contained within the total budget for Members' Allowances for 2014/2015.
- (c) To agree to carry out a survey of Members' views on the Council scheme in advance of the 2015 Borough Council Elections to inform decisions in relation to new scheme.
- (d) To agree a timetable for the review and implementation of a new scheme of Members' allowances both before and after the Local Government Elections next year - full details of which were reported.

**Resolved that:-**

- (1) The formal expansion of the Panel to include Taunton Deane Borough Council be noted;
- (2) The Panel membership including the proposed representatives for Mendip District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council be endorsed; and
- (3) The timetable and process from the formal review of the Taunton Deane Borough Council Members' Allowance Scheme as set out in the report be also endorsed.

(The Mayor (Councillor D Durdan) declared a prejudicial interest in the following item as one of the Tone Leisure Board representatives. He left the room during the consideration of the item. The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hill) took the Chair.)

**11. Swimming Pool Project at Blackbrook Pavilion Sports Centre Update on Capital Budget**

Full Council had previously approved a scheme to provide a Community Pool, Learner Pool, Changing Village and Café at the Blackbrook Pavilion Sports Centre. Councillors had also approved the provision of a Spa facility to provide extra income generation supporting the affordability of the project.

The Business Case and affordability of the investment in this service to the community remained on track. The anticipated construction start time was early 2015.

The tender price was currently being finalised and supply chains investigated in order to produce a final contract price and programme between the Council and the contractors BAM Construction.

The original costing in 2012/2013 had been compiled from a data base of comparable projects previously delivered in the 'market'. Since then the

improvement in the economy had resulted in some significant market changes which had increased costs requiring additional budget as follows:-

Approved Capital Budget	£5,353,000
Required Capital Budget	£5,750,958
Additional Funds required	£ 397,958

The additional funds required represented 7.4% of the original project budget.

When Council gave approval for the project in May 2013 the construction market was stagnant with little optimism for an imminent up-turn in the economy. However, over the last 18 months the construction industry had seen a resurgence in activity with labour and material shortages putting significant pressure on development budgets.

The British Cost Information Service All-in Tender Price Index (TPI) had confirmed an increase of 8.47% between May 2013 and November 2014, with a further 4.24% increase to the mid-point of construction in 2015. The TPI uplift was £680,366 which would give a revised budget of £6,033,366.

The fluctuating market conditions had been managed tightly by the Project Team as part of the general design development and risk management of the project. As a result, further cost savings had been identified which meant the TPI uplift stood at £397,958 and not the figure quoted above.

**Resolved that:-**

- (1) A Supplementary Estimate of £398,000 to the Blackbrook Pool Capital Budget be approved; and
- (2) The £398,000 be allocated from the Growth and Regeneration Earmarked Reserve to fund the additional capital budget requirement.

## 12. **Recommendation to Council from the Executive**

### **(a) Earmarked Reserves Review**

As at 31 March 2014 the level of earmarked General Fund reserves was £8,621,000. This was equivalent to 65.5% of the Council's Net Revenue Budget of £13,162,000.

A fundamental review had been undertaken of all General Fund Revenue Earmarked Reserves, with a view to balances being returned to the General Fund.

As a result of this review, there are various earmarked reserves, totalling £65,060, that are no longer required principally arising from the Waste Contract.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

**Resolved** that a budget return of £65,060 to the General Fund Reserve of surplus balances currently held in Earmarked Reserves be agreed.

### **(b) Fees and Charges 2015/2016**

Consideration had been given to the proposed fees and charges for 2015/2016 for the following services:-

- Cemeteries and Crematorium;
- Waste Services;
- Housing and Community Services;
- Licensing;
- Environmental Health;
- Promotional 'Rotunda' Units in Taunton Town Centre; and
- Deane Helpline.

Details of the proposed increases were submitted. No increases were proposed to Land Charges fees, Planning and Environment or in connection with Building Control.

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 2015/2016 in respect of the Cemeteries and Crematorium, Waste Services, Housing and Community Services, Licensing, Planning, Environmental Health, Promotional 'Rotunda' Units in Taunton Town Centre and the Deane Helpline be agreed.

### **(c) Regeneration of Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington**

A report had recently been considered by the Executive concerning proposals to demolish and redevelop the redundant public house, the 'Weavers Arms', the adjacent public toilet block and ten Woolaway properties in Rockwell Green, Wellington.

A redevelopment scheme of these three areas was currently being designed with an estimated delivery of 26 new build Council homes at a cost of approximately £3,500,000.

The land under the toilet block was currently owned by the General Fund and

had been valued at £10,000.

The Council was seeking to facilitate a sustainable community by providing a mix of properties of 1, 2, 3 and 4 bedrooms to meet the housing need for the area, with the majority being 1 bed flats and 2 bed houses, with some wheelchair suitable properties.

It was intended to design these properties to the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4. This meant the properties would be considerably more energy efficient than current Building Regulations and would also have features such as low water use bathrooms and sinks and A\* rated combination boilers.

Initial consultation had been carried out with tenants living in the Woolaway properties directly affected by the redevelopment and a 'decant officer' would assist the affected families throughout the process either in terms of relocating them or returning them to the development once it was completed.

The wider community would have an opportunity to comment on the scheme proposals at a community event which was scheduled to be held in early 2015 prior to the submission of a planning application.

The proposals had recently been considered by both the Tenants Services Management Board and the Community Scrutiny Committee which both supported the redevelopment scheme.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Jean Adkins, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) A supplementary budget of £3,500,000 within the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme for the Weavers Arms Regeneration Scheme be approved;
- (2) The proposed funding of the scheme be approved in principle with allocations of £488,000 capital receipts; £586,000 Social Housing Development Fund contribution; and £2,426,000 through borrowing and that the determination of the final funding arrangements (in line with the Council's Capital and Treasury Strategies) be delegated to the Section 151 Officer;
- (3) The Rockwell Green Public Convenience land be transferred from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account at the market valuation of £10,000, in compliance with Section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972;
- (4) The Housing Revenue Account budget and 30 Year Business Plan be updated to reflect the additional income and expenditure arising from this investment; and
- (5) The service of Initial and Final Demolition Notices be approved for the demolition of Nos 1-10 Oaken Ground, the Weavers Arms buildings and public toilets and site clearance to facilitate new development.

#### **(d) Photovoltaic Systems to be fitted to existing Housing Stock**

The Executive had also considered a proposal to design, install and commission 350 Photovoltaic systems to the retained Housing Stock.

In order to achieve the Council's goal of reducing tenants' electricity bills, generating an income via feed in tariffs (FITs) and reducing carbon emissions, the experience of The Carbon Savings Alliance (CSA) had been used.

It was proposed to access the CSA's Photovoltaic Purchasing Framework in order to secure a competitive price and reduce the need for tendering.

A desktop study had been carried out to identify approximately 700 suitable properties that had a southern orientation, the correct roof pitch and suitable construction type. The Senior Leadership Team had chosen to focus on 350 of these properties as a 'pilot scheme', to allow for tenant refusal and to borrow an amount that the Housing Revenue Account could feasibly permit.

Although tenants would actively be encouraged take up the opportunity of having PV panels fitted to their properties, this would be a material change leading to the tenancies of the affected properties having to be amended to include the panels as part of the structure.

The scheme would provide significant financial benefits to tenants through free electricity generated by the PV Panels and was likely to provide an average saving of £247.54 per annum per household on current electricity bills.

Taunton Deane would also generate income through the FIT which was guaranteed for 20 years as detailed within the Energy Act. It was Indexed Linked and, based on Government Standard Assessment Procedure calculations, would generate a positive cash flow of £1,200,000 over the fixed 20 year FIT.

By installing 350 systems to the Housing stock, the Council can save approximately 11,015 tonnes of Carbon over 20 years.

The initial capital investment for 350 properties would be £1,509,000 for fitted systems. The systems should be paid back within the first 13 years and the revenue stream would then be additionally guaranteed for 7 years.

Consideration had also been given to the prospect of a Council property with photovoltaic panels being sold under Right to Buy (RtB). It was recommended the panels were removed prior to a RtB purchase being completed for the reasons detailed in the report to the Executive.

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Jean Adkins, it was

**Resolved** that:-

(1) A supplementary budget of £1,509,100 within the Housing Revenue

Account Capital Programme for the Photovoltaic Systems Investment Scheme to install systems at 350 properties be approved;

- (2) The funding of the scheme be approved in principle through borrowing and that the determination of the final funding arrangements (in line with the Council's Capital and Treasury Strategies) be delegated to the Section 151 Officer;
- (3) The Housing Revenue Account Revenue budget and 30 Year Business Plan be updated to reflect the additional income and expenditure arising from this investment; and
- (4) The principle that systems were removed from properties prior to disposal and reinstalled on an appropriate alternative Housing Revenue Account dwelling be endorsed.

#### **(e) Firepool, Taunton – Acquisition of Remaining Third Party Interests**

The Council had been working with its appointed partner, St Modwen Developments Limited, to bring forward the planned development of the Firepool site on a phased basis.

Although a previous Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) had been made by the Council back in 2010 which related to properties adjacent to Priory Bridge Road Car Park, a new CPO covering the area surrounding the Old Cattle Market on the north side of the River Tone was now needed to enable delivery of the next phases of the comprehensive Firepool Development.

This comprised a mixed-use scheme which was considered to be in the public interest as the delivery of this scheme formed a key component of the regeneration of Taunton.

A planning application was proposed to be submitted early in 2015 in relation to this phase which would be in accordance with the broad aims of the adopted Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and the Taunton Rethink.

Although the Council owned almost all of the site of the planned development, there remained various interests which required to be either acquired or over-ridden. Even though negotiations with third party landowners to seek agreement on acquisition would continue, it was considered that CPO powers should be utilised in the event that agreements could not be concluded.

On the motion of Councillor Cavill, it was

#### **Resolved that:-**

- (1) The principle of making a Compulsory Purchase Order or Orders under Section 226(1) (a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) in respect of the land edged red on the plan submitted to the Executive be agreed; and
- (2) The Chief Executive and the Solicitor to the Council be authorised to:-

- (i) Carry out all necessary steps to reference the areas of land to be considered for compulsory purchase and to consult with the owners and occupiers of that land;
- (ii) Report back on the effects that the potential Compulsory Purchase Order would have on all owners and occupiers and the steps that should be taken to mitigate those effects;
- (iii) Negotiate and agree terms for the acquisition by agreement of any of the outstanding land interests detailed in the confidential appendix to the report submitted to the Executive or those which were otherwise subsequently identified as affecting the land and interests to be acquired;
- (iv) Make any necessary preparations to consider potential future payments of compensation (including any interim payments) after future Compulsory Purchase Order notice, either as agreed with landowners or as determined by the Lands Chamber of the Upper Tribunal in relation to acquisition/overriding of properties/interests; and
- (v) Dispose of the land interests acquired either voluntarily (or by way of a future Compulsory Purchase Order or Orders when confirmed in future), to St Modwen Developments Limited in accordance with the Development Agreement dated 15 April 2009 and made between the Council, St Modwen Properties plc and St Modwen Developments Limited.

#### 14. **Suspension of Standing Order**

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

#### **(f) Publication of the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan**

The Taunton Deane Core Strategy had been adopted by Full Council in September 2012. This plan provided an overarching framework for the Borough and its long-term development over the period up to 2028.

Whilst the Core Strategy had established long-term requirements for growth and its broad distribution, barring a number of larger, strategic site allocations and some high level development management policies, it did not include smaller allocations or more detailed development management policies to guide decision-making.

The Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP) set out the development management policies and further site allocations to ensure sustainable development was delivered, consistent with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and the adopted Core Strategy. The Plan included strategic urban extensions at Comeytrove/Trull and Staplegrove as well as further allocations in Taunton and elsewhere in the Borough consistent with the adopted Core Strategy.

The current stage reached in the Plan-making process was referred to as 'Publication'. It was the point at which the Council agreed the draft plan which it intended to submit for consideration by The Planning Inspectorate. The Published Plan was underpinned by a considerable evidence base and the findings of previous consultation.

Following the Plan's approval by the Council it would be published. Comments would then be invited relating to the 'soundness' of the Plan from communities and other stakeholders on 8 January 2015 for the statutory six-week period ending on 19 February 2015. The Plan and these comments would then be considered by an independently appointed Planning Inspector at an Examination which was likely to take place in late Spring / early Summer 2015.

On the motion of Councillor Edwards, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The contents of the Draft Site Allocations and Development Management Plan be noted and that the Plan be approved;
- (2) It be agreed that minor typographical amendments to the Plan could be made following the Plan's approval but prior to its publication; and
- (3) It also be agreed that the Published Plan be submitted to the Secretary of State following the formal representation period, subject to the Executive Councillor for Planning and Transportation, as guided by officers, considering there were no substantive soundness issues raised which would warrant further amendment to the Plan.

### **(g) Review of Council Tax Support Scheme for 2015/2016**

On 1 April 2013 Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was abolished and replaced with a locally designed "Council Tax Support" (CTS) Scheme. The Government provided each billing authority with a grant and expected Councils to design a CTS scheme to help those on low incomes to meet their Council Tax liability.

Whilst the Council had discretion on the rules for CTS for people of working age, the Government has stipulated that pensioners should be fully protected under the same criteria that previously applied to CTB.

Full Council had decided to continue the 2013/2014 CTS scheme for 2014/2015 at its meeting on 10 December 2013. However, as indicative figures showed the Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) would be substantially reduced, officers were tasked with consulting on proposals to amend the existing CTS scheme from 1 April 2015.

In 2013/2014 the Government had provided total funding of £6,110,080. However, the indicative figures for CTS in 2015/2016 had been reduced by £1,600,000 to £4,503,377 (a cut of £179,000 for Taunton Deane in isolation).



As the Council was prevented from reducing CTS spending for those of pension age, if cuts were applied they would be made from the support provided to people of working age.

By reducing the overall budget for CTS, it would mean the remaining budget available for working age recipients would be reduced to £1,332,811. Based on the current CTS Scheme it was estimated there would be an overall CTS budget shortfall of £1,310,000, with Taunton Deane's share of that shortfall being £127,000.

The number of households billed for Council Tax had increased from 50,211 in 2012/2013 to 50,882 in 2013/2014. Although, the collection rate had remained the same as the previous year, it has become clear that the volume of recovery action had again increased to ensure collection levels remained high.

Although a decision to alter the scheme for 2015/2016 could be taken, the Council had to consult with the major precepting authorities, publish a draft scheme and then consult with other such persons who were likely to have an interest in the operation of such a scheme. This had taken place during the Spring.

Within the 2013/2014 LGFS the Government had included funding for CTS that included a proportion relating to parishes and Special Expenses. The Council had decided to pass on a proportion of this funding to parishes to reflect their reduction in funding as a result of CTS. A grant had been given to parishes based on the tax base reduction attributable to CTS in each parish multiplied by their 2012/2013 Band D Charge.

The Funding Settlement for 2015/2016 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 2015/2016 to give the Council and parishes some certainty for financial planning and budget setting purposes.

For 2015/2016 there were two proposed options:-

**Option 1:** Use the same formula that was used for 2014/2015, so each parish grant for CTS would be calculated as CTS Tax Base Adjustment x 2013/2014 Parish Band D Tax rate; and

**Option 2:** Use the same formula that was used for 2014/2015, but apply the same reduction to parish grant funding as that experienced by Taunton Deane in the Funding Settlement. Provisional figures indicated a 30.5% cut in funding for 2014/2015 and 2015/2016, so each parish grant for CTS would be calculated as CTS Tax Base Adjustment x 2013/2014 Parish Band D Tax rate x [1-0.305].

Although Option 1 was recommended for approval - as it would provide protection for parish budgets – it would mean that Taunton Deane would need to find savings from its own service budgets to subsidise CTS costs for parishes. It was also recommended that the same funding principle agreed

for parishes should be applied to the Council budget for the Unparished Area Fund.

This issue had been considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 28 October 2014. Having considered the outcome of the consultation, Members had recommended the Executive to retain maximum support for all working age recipients at 80% in 2015/2016.

In addition, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had recommended that maintenance received for children should not be treated as income when working out CTS in 2015/2016.

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

**Resolved** that:-

(1) Having regard to:-

- the recommendations from the Corporate Scrutiny Committee;
- the outcome of the consultation exercise;
- the feedback from customers as to how they were attempting to meet shortfall;
- the profile of Council Tax debt for CTS recipients; and
- the Equality Impact Assessment,

a Council Tax Support scheme for 2015/2016 be adopted that sought, as far as possible, to balance the significant cut to the Council's resources for Council Tax Support and the Council's wider budget challenges with the need to help the most financially vulnerable members of the community;

(2) It be agreed to continue to provide maximum support through Council Tax Support for working age recipients at 80% with the current Council Tax Support scheme being amended to ignore maintenance received for a child or children;

(3) It be further agreed that Option 1 be the preferred route in providing and calculating Council Tax Support Grant funding for Parish Councils in 2015/2016; and

(4) It be noted that the 2015/2016 Council Tax Support Scheme was recommended for 2015/2016 only.

Due to the lateness of the hour, The Mayor agreed that the following Executive Councillor Reports, covering the topics set out, be taken as read. Any questions Members had on the reports to be submitted to the relevant Executive Councillor by e-mail with responses circulated to all Councillors.

### **13. 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:-

- Town Centre Successes;

- A358 and Strategic Employment Site;
- Budget Setting;
- Firepool, Taunton;
- Broadband Rollout by Connecting Devon and Somerset;
- Somerset Rivers Authority; and
- The Deane House Relocation Project.

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

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

- Housing and Health and Wellbeing Board;
- Deane Housing Development : Weavers Arms/Oaken Ground;
- Digital Access Project;
- Welfare Reform;
- Voids; and
- Anti-Social Behaviour.

(iii) **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;
- Customer Contact Centre;
- Health and Wellbeing;
- Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services;
- Resources; and
- Revenues and Benefits.

(iv) **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 Plan (SADMP);
- Junction 25;
- Junction 27
- Neighbourhood Planning;
- Monkton Heathfield Governance Board;
- Routes to the River Tone Project;
- Car Parking; and
- Communications.

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

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

- Community Safety;
- New Anti-Social Behaviour Legislation;
- New Psychoactive Substances;
- Domestic Abuse;
- One Teams in North Taunton and Wellington;
- Neighbourhood Policing Awards 2014; and
- Christmas Taunton Town Wardens.

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

The report from Councillor Cavill covered:-

- Staffing Issues;
- Business Support;
- Support for Inward Investors;
- The Brewhouse Theatre;
- Taunton Town Centre; and
- Marketing and Taunton Information Centre (TIC).

(vii) **Environmental Services and Climate Change (Councillor Hunt)**

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

- Environmental Health / Licensing;
- Deane DLO;
- Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP); and
- Climate Change.

(vii) **Sports, 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.

(Councillor Mrs Slattery left the meeting at 7.49 p.m. Councillors P Smith and Stone both left the meeting at 8.15 p.m. Councillors Ross and Mrs Baker left the meeting at 8.50 p.m. Councillor Mrs Webber left the meeting at 9.10 p.m. and Councillor A Govier left the meeting at 9.15 p.m.)

(The meeting ended at 9.45 pm.)