

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 14 July 2015 at 6.30 p.m.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hill)
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams)
 Councillors Mrs Adkins, M Adkins, Aldridge, Appleby, Beale, Berry,
 Mrs Blatchford, Bowrah, Brown, Cavill, Coles, Coombes, Cossey,
 Davies, D Durdan, Miss Durdan, Mrs Edwards, M Edwards, Gage,
 Gaines, A Govier, Mrs Gunner, Habgood, Hall, Mrs Herbert, Horsley,
 Hunt, James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, Ms Lisgo, Martin-Scott, Morrell,
 Nicholls, Parrish, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Reed, Ross, Ryan, Miss Smith,
 Mrs Smith, Stone, Sully, Townsend, Mrs Warmington, Watson,
 Wedderkopp and Williams

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 31 March 2015 and the Annual Meeting of Council held on 20 May 2015, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, C Hill, Mrs Tucker, Ms Webber and Wren

3. Declaration of Interests

Councillors M Adkins, Coles, A Govier, Hunt, Prior-Sankey and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Beale declared personal interests as a Board Member and Director of Tone FM, Chief Executive of the 'Think Amy' Charity and as a Governor of the South West Ambulance NHS Trust. Councillor D Durdan declared a prejudicial interest as a Tone Leisure Board representative. Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the future Chairman of Governors of Queens College. This appointment would commence with effect from 1 September 2015. 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

Mr Alan Debenham asked the following questions:-

- (1) With reference to last week's national Budget Statement, what was Taunton Deane's latest forecast for the coming financial year concerning cuts in total expenditure and jobs which will have to be made to bridge the gap made by the reduction in funding?

- (2) What impact will the present further shelving of Hinkley C and its probable cancellation because of financing and design problems have on the Council's budgeting and other plans?
- (3) Plans to pedestrianise Taunton Town Centre were discussed at length some years ago and shelved subject to the construction of the new Tangier Bridge. With the bridge now in place but coupled with much build-up of traffic in the town centre, was it not time to re-open discussions with Somerset County Council with a view to bringing pedestrianisation back into top priority focus?

Councillor Williams replied as follows:-

- (1) The Chancellor's Budget announcements last week included a number of elements which will need to be taken into account when reviewing our financial forecasts. The Budget did not include specific details of local authority funding but it is clear that public spending will reduce in the coming years to address the national deficit. Details of this Council's future funding were expected to follow the Government's Spending Review in the autumn, through the annual funding settlement which is normally provided to the local authorities in December.

We currently have a projected Budget Gap of more than £1,000,000 for next year. Our Finance officers are currently undertaking a review of our financial forecasts for our Medium Term Financial Plan – which will be reported next month – and will no doubt confirm that we continue to face significant challenges in the coming years.

Plans for meeting any budget gap will be considered through the budget process in the coming months.

- (2) Nothing with this Council's current budget is dependent on Hinkley C progressing. You will appreciate Hinkley is more directly relevant to West Somerset. We would be due some funding under Section 106 planning obligations to help with the supply of housing should the project go ahead. We do have plans to ensure that Taunton Deane-based businesses can take part in the supply chain for the Hinkley C project. We will put those plans into action once wider financing decisions have been made. Responsibility for design standards rests with the Office of Nuclear regulation rather than the local authority.
- (3) The pedestrianisation of Taunton Town Centre remains an ambition that is currently under discussion with Somerset County Council and forms one of a number of projects in the Taunton Growth Programme, many of which are currently unfunded. Ideas for progressing such a scheme will come forward during 2015.

5. **Receipt of Petition from Churchstanton Parish Council concerning the 387 Bus Service**

Mr David Gollin drew the attention of Councillors to the consultation currently being undertaken by Devon County Council (DCC) about public transport

provision. The 387 bus service which operated between Sidmouth - Tipton St. John - Wiggaton - Ottery St. Mary - Gittisham - Honiton - Monkton - Rawridge - Uppottery - Smeatharpe – Churchinford – Culmhead – Blagdon Hill – Staplehay – Taunton was a route under consideration.

This DCC funded service ran as one return trip daily. The proposed changes would mean that this would be reduced to once a week. Churchstanton Parish Council had made representations to DCC and had organised a petition with sufficient signatures to trigger a debate at Full Council.

Whilst it was acknowledged that DCC currently funded the service, the Parish Council felt that a decision to reduce it should not be made without paying due regard to the five Somerset stops and the service they provided.

Public transport provision was a fundamental tenant to Churchinford being designated a Minor Rural Centre within the Core Strategy. It was therefore hoped that Taunton Deane would show its support for this basic bus service being maintained at the current level.

As a first step, Mr Gollin asked the Council to request Somerset County Council (SCC) and DCC to work together on the cross border routes to ensure rural communities were not disadvantaged due to their close proximity to the County border. He also sought the support of Members for an increase in the availability of the 'Slinky Bus' Service.

In response, the Executive Councillor for Business Development, Asset Management and Communications, Councillor Mark Edwards, thanked Mr Gollin for bringing the matter to the attention of the Council. SCC would be encouraged to liaise with DCC in an attempt to seek a satisfactory solution to the proposed reduction in the 387 bus service which ran between Sidmouth and Taunton.

The Council endorsed this suggested approach.

6. Motion – Working with the Core Strategy

Moved by Councillor Coles, seconded by Councillor Horsley

“Taunton Deane Borough Council has proudly been one of the first Councils in the country to have put in a Land Use Strategy for the period from 2011 to 2028 to encompass the required developments needed to meet the challenge of a rising population, an older demographic, the greater requirement for smaller household units and the need to embrace growth as the means of funding this.

What we have failed to do is to convince the Government of the need to recognise that the existing residents should have a true influence on how the plans are implemented and secondly that the infrastructure needs hugely exceed the means of raising funds for it from the private sector alone.

We strongly believe therefore that Taunton Deane's future scope for increased sustainable development should be based on an holistic approach

and evidence, to include master planning at the outset not after completion/towards the end of any development especially in applications in excess of 200 houses. Officers should be encouraged to enter into dialogue with current applicants and develop where possible Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Taunton Deane should take into account the impact on the neighbouring wards in terms of increased traffic, flood prevention, doctor's surgeries, school provisions and adequate freehold affordable employment land to complement the housing. We do indeed recognise that some of the above issues are within the remit of the County Council but as the Local Planning Authority we have enormous influence in shaping our Borough, to leave a legacy that our future generation will thank us for!

We therefore ask the Council to:-

1. Reinforce the Core Strategy 2011-2028, that any piecemeal development should be resisted;
2. Ensure that infrastructures such as roads, schools, flood prevention schemes and adequate Green Wedge and open space amenities are delivered at the outset;
3. Sensitively design homes so the characteristic of the area is not adversely impacted with the environment at the heart of every design;
4. Ensure that development is closely aligned to communities and their aspirations;
5. Ensure allocated land should be built on before any further developments. Retain and endorse that all schemes should contain a minimum of 25% affordable housing regardless of feasibility; and
6. Rebalance the housing numbers and employment land by providing 25% affordable employment land on or off all large sites to create one job per new household.”

The following amended motion was proposed by Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Habgood:-

“Taunton Deane Borough Council has proudly been one of the first Council in the country to have an approved Core Strategy for the period from 2011 to 2028. This encompasses the required developments to meet the challenge of a rising population, an older demographic, the greater requirement for smaller household units and the need to embrace growth as the means of funding this. It has stood us in good stead over the years protecting our community from major development outside the plan.

The Government does recognise that the existing residents should have a true influence on how the plans are implemented that is why they have introduced and promote Neighbourhood Planning. They also recognise the need for infrastructure that is why we have recently received allocations of £275,000,000 for the A358, £13,000,000 for the upgrade of Junction 25,

£7,600,000 for Taunton Railway Station, £700,000 for the Monkton Heathfield Delivery Board and £25,000,000 to the developers of Monkton Heathfield from The Growth Fund. It is accepted because of the huge demand substantial amounts must also come from the private sector by way of the Community Infrastructure Levy which we have also introduced.

Taunton Deane's future scope for sustainable development continues to be based on an holistic approach of which master planning is fundamental to any successful application. Officers already enter into dialogue with current applicants through the pre-planning advice system and develop where possible a Planning Protocol with major applicants. This sets out agreed targets to be met when the application is under consideration.

Taunton Deane does fully consult with neighbouring wards where impact is likely in terms of increased traffic, flood prevention, doctor's surgeries, school provisions and adequate employment land to complement the housing. We do recognise that some of the above issues are within the remit of the County Council but as the Local Planning Authority we have enormous influence in shaping our Borough, to leave a legacy that our future generation will thank us for!

We therefore reaffirm the Council should :-

1. Reinforce the Core Strategy 2011-2028, that helps us resist any unwanted development with the Core Strategy review taking place as soon as is practical, scheduled for 2016.
2. Continue our efforts that infrastructures such as roads, schools, flood prevention schemes and adequate Green Wedge and open space amenities are given priority at the outset.
3. Seek sensitively designed homes so the characteristic of the area is not adversely impacted and holding the environment at the heart of every design.
4. Ensure that development is closely aligned to communities and their aspirations and encourage the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.
5. Encourage allocated land to be built on before any further developments but to achieve this we must also be mindful of ensuring adequate provision for the 5 years future land supply, our greatest defence against unplanned development. Reconfirm all efforts are made to deliver 25% affordable housing from our Core Strategy and within the requirements of the NPPF and,
6. Ensure housing numbers are matched by allocation of adequate employment land as we need to maintain our excellent self containment rate of 77% of our working community that live and work in Taunton."

Proposed by Councillor Gaines, seconded by Councillor Prior-Sankey that paragraph 2 above be changed by the addition of the following additional sentence:-

“With the recognition that public art is something that is valued and supported by Taunton Deane Borough Council.”

The proposer and seconder of the amended motion accepted the change to the wording of paragraph 2.

The amended motion – incorporating the change to paragraph 2 – was put and was carried.

The substantive motion was put and was carried.

7. Public Space Protection Order, Taunton

Considered report previously circulated concerning the introduction of a Public Space Protection Order covering Taunton Town Centre and the surrounding area.

Historically, Taunton Deane had had a ‘No Drinking Byelaw’ which made it an offence to drink alcohol in the town centre.

This Byelaw was replaced by a Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) under sections 13 and 14 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 with a further Order being introduced in Wellington in 2002.

In October 2014, the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 was enacted. This widened the range of activities that could be covered as well as changing the name to a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO). It also meant that the existing Designated Public Place Order could continue until October 2017 but would need to be changed to the new power or revoked by that date.

During 2014, two ‘legal high’ shops were opened in Taunton. Between them, they were responsible for a large spike in anti-social behaviour incidents and Taunton became well known in a short space of time for having a legal high ‘problem’ and, as a result, it became clear that action was required.

Although the Police were able to successfully persuade one shop owner to stop selling legal highs, the other persisted. This business was served a Community Protection Notice and ultimately a Community Protection Order was upheld in Court; being renewed for a further 3 months, to make 6 months in total. This expired in the middle of June 2015 but, to date, the shop had not re-opened.

Noted that the City of Lincoln was first to use the new legislation to create a PSPO to cover the use of ‘intoxicating substances’ and the wording of its Order dealt with the behaviours Taunton Deane wished to challenge. This wording had therefore formed the basis of the Council’s draft PSPO.

Reported that the Council was satisfied, with partners, that the burden of proof for introducing the Order was met and furthermore that the benefits on the wider public of introducing such an Order outweighed the rights of individuals to behave in this way.

Home Office guidance required consultation to have taken place before the introduction of such an Order and this was completed in April 2015. Public response to the issue was limited to just over 30 replies but all of these were in favour of the PSPO.

Further reported that Wellington Town Council were consulted on what they wished to do with their DPPO earlier in June. The Town Council had indicated that they wished to convert it into a PSPO with the same terms and conditions as Taunton. The Police had supported this view.

Enforcement would largely be carried out by Police officers (including Police Community Support Offices) but could also be carried out by Council officers who already issued fixed penalty notices.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Public Space Protection Order for Taunton be authorised;
- (2) The responsibility for signing off the Public Space Protection Order for Wellington be delegated to the Portfolio Holder, subject to formal public consultation and approval from Wellington Town Council;
- (3) The responsibility for future amendments to either Order be delegated to the Portfolio Holder; and
- (4) The responsibility for decisions on new Public Space Protection Orders be also delegated to the Portfolio Holder subject to formal public consultations having taken place.

(The Joint Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer all declared a prejudicial interest in the following matter and left the meeting during its consideration.)

8. Regulatory Amendments to Statutory Protection Provisions

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the effects of the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 which had come into effect on 11 May 2015.

The Chief Executive, Director - Operations and Deputy Chief Executive and the Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer had statutory responsibilities to discharge to their Councils. Since 2001 these posts had benefitted from statutory protection in the form of mandatory Standing Orders requiring any investigation of misconduct in respect of such officers to be undertaken by a Designated Independent Person (DIP).

Disciplinary action could only be taken against these officers in accordance with a recommendation in a report made by a DIP. Therefore, to date all Councils had been required to have in place appropriate standing order provisions within their constitutions to reflect these requirements.

The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 attempted to simplify, as well as localise, this process by removing the requirement for the appointment of a DIP. The 2015 Regulations also removed any specific enhanced protection for these posts where disciplinary action short of dismissal was proposed.

In place of the DIP process, but only in relation to a proposed dismissal, the Regulations provided that a decision to dismiss a post-holder in one of these statutory posts could only be taken by Full Council taking into account any advice, views or recommendations from an independent panel.

Following the coming into force of the 2015 Regulations a debate amongst professional associations at national level had emerged which identified numerous concerns about the content of the Regulations. Details of the issues causing concern were set out in the report.

Taking into account the matters of concern, there was currently a lack of clarity as to how the new regulations could be enacted by Councils without the serious risk of legal challenge.

As a result, representations had been made to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) requesting clarification of, and preferably amendments to, the 2015 Regulations.

A reply had been received from the DCLG specifically in relation to the make-up of the panel. This confirmed the Government's intention that the advisory panel should only comprise independent persons and not elected Members but this remained inconsistent with the regulations. However, the response did not address the issues of the conflict between the legislative requirements applying to the appointed independent persons. As the situation stood, the Somerset Monitoring Officers Group (SMOG) was unable to identify a suitable local solution that the Councils in Somerset could apply to overcome this conflict.

At its most recent meeting, SMOG had considered the two options which were available for recommendation to the six Somerset Councils. These were:-

- (a) Defer amendment of existing Standing Order provisions to the autumn in the hope that a satisfactory way forward could be achieved in consultation with DCLG. This carried some risk if a Somerset Council was faced with a relevant disciplinary or dismissal situation in advance of any changes being formally agreed to a Council's constitutional arrangements. However, ways in which such a situation could be managed were submitted; and
- (b) Each Council proceeded with the establishment of a panel comprising independent persons or a mix of independent persons and elected Members.

Although either of these options would run a significant risk of not being compliant with the new regulations or in conflict with other legislative requirements, SMOG had recommended option (a) as the most appropriate way forward.

Resolved that agreeing revisions to the existing Standing Order provisions relating to the statutory protection arrangements for the posts of Chief Executive, Director - Operations and Deputy Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer should be deferred until the December 2015 meeting of Full Council for the reasons outlined in the report.

9. **Appointment of new Taunton Deane Borough Council Director to the Southwest One Board**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed appointment of Councillor Terry Hall as a new Director to the Southwest One (SW1) Board.

The Council had entered into a contract in 2007 with Somerset County Council and IBM to form the SW1 'joint venture partnership' company. The Avon and Somerset Police subsequently joined the partnership in 2008.

Under the terms of the contract the Authority is entitled and required to nominate a Director to sit on the Board of SW1. To date the Director appointed had always been a Member from the ruling group.

Prior to the election the role was filled by Councillor Bruce Nottrodt. However, Councillor Nottrodt had decided not to stand for re-election meaning a new Director had to be appointed.

The decision to appoint a new Director needed to be taken by Full Council in its capacity as the Taunton Deane 'Shareholder' in respect of the SW1 contract. It was important for the appointment to be made to enable the Council to be represented at the next meeting of the SW1 Board on 30 July 2015.

Once appointed the Director could nominate an Alternate Director to act on their behalf in respect of any Board meetings which they were unable to attend.

Resolved that Councillor Terry Hall be appointed to act as the Authority's Director to the Southwest One Board with immediate effect.

10. **Written Questions to Members of the Executive**

(i) **From Councillor Horsley to Councillor Williams**

1. Councillor Williams attended the "Culture Pays" conference at the Castle Hotel run by Arts Taunton and Taunton Forward on Wednesday last, 8 July. Does he not agree with me that his response to the plea made by Sir Peter Bazalgette and Harry Bronjes to "think big" and "act like a city" sounds hollow when all he can offer is a Waitrose on the Firepool site and we know 40% of the site will simply be a car park? Is

his vision for Taunton no more than that? Will he be proud when the iconic land mark will be a multi-storey car park at the Railway Station competing with our wonderful Church towers if you view the town from the Quantocks? He talks about the “long planned Boulevard” in his report but why is he not mentioning the Sculpture Trail which will mitigate to some extent the damage he is likely to cause by pursuing this vision for the town? Does he agree with the concept that Culture Pays?

2. Councillor Williams’s report on Investment and Growth is silent on the future of Coal Orchard. Is this because he has no plans for this either? What thoughts can he reveal to the Council about the future of the site when the swimming pool at Blackbrook opens and St James becomes redundant? Has he the courage to tell the Council what he intends to do about this or is he not prepared to grasp the nettle of how to champion The Brewhouse Theatre on the one hand, with the desire to work with Somerset Cricket Club and use the site (and our land ownership) to consider the idea of a Cultural Centre capable of undertaking gigs and widely achieving County and regional status for this town in the field of the Arts and attracting life and jobs back into the town in the evenings?

Reply - I thank Councillor Horsley for advance notice of his question.

I am sure Cllr Horsley will recall that the Taunton Rethink document commissioned by the Council was approved by the Executive in January 2014, having also been formally endorsed Community Scrutiny Committee and key partners.

It is heartening to see the ambition in the Taunton Rethink – to ‘think like a city’ – being adopted by others including Taunton Forward and Arts Taunton.

He is well aware that the proposals for Firepool, which were adopted as part of the Taunton Rethink, extend well beyond provision of a supermarket. The rethink proposals are a matter of public record and also include a range of uses including commercial leisure, offices, retail, residential, bars and cafes, public realm and essential car parking. Our development partners St Modwen are now bringing forward a scheme that is commercially viable and reflects the ambitions in the Taunton Rethink document. In light of these facts, which I reiterate are a matter of public record, it is highly disingenuous and misleading to characterise the ambitions for Firepool as including only a supermarket.

I will indeed be proud when the Railway Station redevelopment is completed. Car parking is an essential part of this scheme, although the other elements such as new ticket office, new public realm and public transport interchange will also be key features of this multi million pound investment in Taunton. The newly enhanced station will enable Taunton to make the most of its excellent connections to London and other national destinations

I enjoyed the Culture Pays conference and we are already working constructively with Arts Taunton on their ideas for sculpture pieces at key locations throughout the Town. I am surprised Cllr Horsley feels the need to

ask me if I agree with the concept that Culture Pays. He will no doubt be aware of the huge and varied agenda of events that the Council has supported over the years, such as the hugely successful Olympic Torch event, the now well established 'Somersetfest' festival and of course the re-opening of The Brewhouse Theatre.

I am positive about Taunton and its future. It is such a shame that Councillor Horsley persists in a line of questioning that is all about talking Taunton down!

(ii) From Councillor Horsley to Councillor Edwards

1. I am surprised to see that no mention has been made of Asset Management in Councillor Edwards's report? As Taunton Deane's Assets were estimated (excluding Housing) to be worth some £65,000,000 in 2013 and earning the Council only 0.9% per annum over the past five years from them, am I right in drawing the conclusion that this is no sort of priority for the new administration?

Reply - You are completely incorrect in reaching the conclusion that Taunton Deane assets are no "sort of priority" for the new administration, indeed you could not be more wrong.

The portfolio is brand new to me and I have been discussing with officers how we progress. In this short period since I have been appointed there is nothing specifically new to report at this stage and I was cautious about what I publically reported due to the potential commercial sensitivities about some of the discussions I have been having.

2. In respect of paragraph 2.1 of your report, can you explain to the public exactly what Taunton Deane's inward investment policy is? There is confusion from the "in/out, in/out" policy towards Into Somerset. It sounds more like the 'Hokey Cokey' to me! We withdrew in 2013 only to reinstate ourselves in 2014 and now it is all being handed over to the County Council. Do you admit under paragraph 2.4 the appointment of (yet another) consultant is a failure on the part of the administration to effectively market Taunton Deane's services to enable inward investment?

Reply - Into Somerset is the County-wide partnership to raise awareness of Somerset to potential investors. The Council is a member of the partnership, which comprises all of the other Councils in the County. Led by the County Council since April of this year, Into Somerset is currently refocussing its work, refreshing the website and taking on professional marketing expertise to enable new campaigns and activities later this year. The partnership is currently fully funded by the County Council, although the Borough Council is a full member and is invited to enhance marketing activities alongside the other districts.

The previous decisions were based on our perception of the value of the contract at that time. We believe this new contract will enable value for money to be gained from the approach.

The attraction of new investors to Taunton Deane is a central element of the Council's strategy to stimulate investment and growth, alongside providing support to our existing business community. Our work to attract inward investment is on two fronts, through Into Somerset and through 'Taunton: Growing Success'.

The marketing of Taunton Deane under the banner 'Taunton: Growing Success' is carried out by the Economic Development Team, and the dedicated website at www.taunton.uk.com is a well-presented source of valuable information to assist investors. Over the past four months the site has been significantly improved with new functionality and content added. It is the team's aim to roll out a national marketing campaign later this year, targeting property agents and potential investors direct.

The two approaches to marketing are entirely compatible, and both web sites sit alongside each other. If a potential investor lands on the Into Somerset site his enquiry is directed towards the district or districts that will be best positioned to respond and accommodate the request. Each district is thereby given the opportunity to present its own strengths to the investor, and to progress the subsequent fulfilment of the investment. This arrangement respects the commonalities of Somerset's offer to businesses, but also accommodates local accountability and the healthy rivalry that exists between towns with the County.

Over the past couple of years the inward investment marketing has been successful in attracting notable interest to Taunton Deane and has secured a handful of actual investments. Most recently, Kijlstra, who opened a production and distribution facility at the former Tarmac depot in Henlade in February, identified the site having arrived via Into Somerset and www.taunton.uk.com. Having visited the Into Somerset website, the business focussed in on Taunton and was able to draw upon the respective support offered by each of the two organisations.

Taunton has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and the Council has been directly responsible for at least 200 new jobs in the recent year with many more opportunities arising

Oh, and I can't stand the 'Hokey Cokey'!

3. We are (yet again) producing "a comprehensive audit and summary of Taunton Deane's available employment sites" (under paragraph 2.5). Will he have the courage to reveal to the public whether he has found a suitable site for the relocation of the Hydrographic Office whom we all know are anxious to move from Creechbarrow Hill or is this going to be yet another glorious failure on the part of the Council to adequately establish a pattern of growth for new industry in the district – or in this case retaining it?

Reply - The Council continues to work very closely and constructively with the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) on options they are considering for a potential new build and relocation of their HQ. Contrary to Councillor Horsley's and Farbahi's' assertions, retention on their existing site remains a clear option and it would be inappropriate for me to disclose potential

relocation options that UKHO are looking at. I can however wholeheartedly assure Members that we are committed to retaining this key employer in Taunton and enabling them to grow their digital business.

I must finish by stating I do not recognise your constant negative statements about our town and I would have thought that maybe you might have learnt a lesson from the recent elections.....clearly not!

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

Financial Outturn 2014/2015

The Executive had recently considered the Council's financial outturn for revenue and capital expenditure in 2014/2015 for the Council's General Fund (GF), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and trading services.

2014/2015 Financial Performance

There had been a number of significant challenges faced by the Council this year, and these had had an impact on the overall financial position for the authority. These included:-

- The new Business Rates Retention scheme had presented some challenges during the year for the authority. This was a high risk area which could impact on the Council's ability to accurately forecast the financial position. The new regime had again proved to be volatile. There had been a huge increase in appeals by rate payers to the Valuation Office in March 2015, which had adversely affected the funding position at the year end.
- Forecasting for demand-led services had continued to be a challenge especially in the current economic climate. The Council had directed more focus on the higher risk / more volatile areas, with accountants supporting Budget Holders with more detailed trend analysis to further improve forecasting in the future.
- The Council had undertaken major restructuring throughout the year with the implementation of joint management and shared services (JMASS) with West Somerset. This had required significant changes to accounting arrangements including restructuring of cost centres and budget accountability to support the new structure of the Councils.

A summary of the Outturn was as follows:-

General Fund Revenue

The General Fund (GF) Revenue Outturn for 2014/2015 was a Net Expenditure position of £13,901,000, which was a £222,000 (1.7%) underspend against the Final Net Budget for the year. The financial position in respect of Retained Business Rates had again highlighted the significant risks to this funding stream through appeals and refunds, with net outstanding appeals increasing from Gross Rateable Value £34,000,000 in March 2014 to £48,000,000 in March 2015. Provisions related to a large increase in appeals

lodged in March 2015 had effectively fully allocated the Council's contingency for Business Rate funding volatility. It was therefore proposed to allocate the £222,000 underspend to the Business Rates Smoothing Reserve. Carry Forwards of £443,000 were also proposed.

The GF Reserves balance as at 31 March 2015 stood at £2,109,000. This balance would reduce to £1,887,000 if the allocation of the 2014/2015 underspend to the Business Rates Smoothing Reserve was approved. The balance remained above the minimum reserves expectation within the Council's Budget Strategy (£1,500,000).

The Earmarked Reserves balance as at 31 March 2015 is £15,308,000, representing funds that had been set aside for specific purposes to fund expenditure in 2015/2016 or later years.

Deane DLO Trading Account

The DLO had made an overall profit of £109,000 after contributing £101,000 to the General Fund. This surplus had been transferred to the DLO Trading Account Reserves increasing the reserve balance to £314,000.

Deane Helpline Trading Account

The Deane Helpline had reported a net deficit of £49,000 for the year, which was an underspend of £34,000 against the final budget and represented the net cost of the service to the General Fund.

General Fund Capital

The General Fund profiled Capital Programme at the end of 2014/2015 was £4,365,000. The profiled expenditure on Capital Programmes during 2014/2015 was £2,351,000, with £2,374,000 being carried forward to support delivery of approved schemes in 2015/2016.

Housing Revenue Account Revenue

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was a 'Self-Financing' account for the Council's Housing Landlord function, which was budgeted to 'break even' (net of approved transfers to/from HRA Reserves). The HRA Outturn for 2014/2015 was a net underspend of £1,269,000 (4.8% of gross income). Approval was sought for a number of proposals which, if approved, would allocate £776,000 of the net underspend to support investment in housing services.

The HRA Reserve balance as at 31 March 2015 stood at £3,484,000, which was above the minimum level (£1,800,000) set within the Council's Budget Strategy and HRA Business Plan. This balance would reduce to £2,708,000 if the allocations of £776,000 were approved.

The HRA Earmarked Reserves balance as at 31 March 2015 stood at £2,222,000. This included £112,000 related to the Social Housing Development Fund.

HRA Capital

The HRA approved Capital Programme at the end of 2014/2015 was £24,907,000. This related to schemes which would be completed over the next five years. The actual expenditure on Capital Programmes during

2014/2015 was £9,869,000, with £14,793,000 for planned investment to implement approved schemes in future years. The underspend reported in 2014/2015 against the overall programme was £245,000, related to disabled facilities adaptations. A Carry Forward of £9,583,000 was also proposed.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that:-

- (a) The reported General Fund Revenue Budget underspend of £222,000 in 2014/2015 and the General Reserves Balance of £2,109,000 as at 31 March 2015 be noted;
- (b) The transfer of £222,000 from General Reserves to the Business Rates Smoothing Reserve at the beginning of 2015/2016 be approved;
- (c) The General Fund Revenue Budget Carry Forwards totalling £443,000 be approved;
- (d) A General Fund Capital Programme Budget Carry Forward totalling £2,374,000 be approved;
- (e) A Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme Budget Carry Forward totalling £9,583,000 be approved; and
- (f) £776,000 of Supplementary Budget allocations for the Housing Revenue Account, utilising 2014/2015 underspends be also approved for the following areas:-
 - i. £150,000 to fund a full review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan in 2015/2016;
 - ii. £160,000 to fund Pre-Void and Tenant Inspections in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, with any balance across financial years held in an earmarked reserve;
 - iii. £100,000 to fund a Lettings Contingency Budget in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, with any balance across financial years held in an earmarked reserve;
 - iv. £60,000 to fund a Sheltered Housing Project Management to October 2016;
 - v. £41,000 to fund Mental Health Support for tenants;
 - vi. £138,000 to fund Employment and Skills Development in 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018, with any balance across financial years held in an earmarked reserve; and
 - vii. £127,000 to fund a One Team Co-ordinator post in 2016/2017 and 2017/2018, with funding to be held in an earmarked reserve.

11. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

12. **Proposed Compulsory Purchase of Land at Monkton Heathfield**

In order to ensure the full development of the Monkton Heathfield Local Plan and Core Strategy allocated site, it was essential that a new road link was provided in the location identified in the report. Planning permission was granted in February 2015 which established a route for the new road.

The plan submitted showed the approved road with the land that would be the subject of any Compulsory Purchase Order if such action was deemed to be necessary. This proposed link would travel over land in separate third party ownership.

Discussions were currently underway between the developer and the third party land owners to secure the required land but negotiations had not yet been completed, and the Council needed to have a contingency plan in place in the event that the acquisition of the relevant land did not proceed by agreement in order to facilitate continuous delivery.

Resolved that subject to the securing of financial arrangements which protected the Council – either in the form of a back to back Legal Agreement or otherwise a full underwriting of the costs of a Compulsory Purchase Order including acquisition – and which ensured that the entire Compulsory Purchase Order process was cost neutral and there were no on-going liabilities for the Council, the authorisation of the use of Compulsory Purchase Powers in order to acquire the necessary land to deliver the Monkton Heathfield Western Relief Road be approved

14. **Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors**

Due to the lateness of the hour, the Mayor suggested that any questions in relation to their reports should be sent to the Executive Councillors in writing outside of the meeting and responses circulated to all Members. This was agreed.

(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- The First Full Council meeting of the Quadrennium;
- Investment and Growth Initiatives;
- Infrastructure;
- LGA (Local Government Association) Conference;
- The Deane House Relocation Project; and

- New House Completions.

(ii) Housing Services (Councillor Beale)

Councillor Mrs Beale submitted his report which drew attention to the following:-

- Deane Housing Development : Creechbarrow Road, Taunton; Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington; and Further Development Opportunities;
- Affordable Housing;
- Welfare Reform Visits;
- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP); and
- Universal Credit (UC).

(iii) Environmental Services (Councillor Berry)

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

- Environmental Health / Licensing;
- Climate Change;
- Somerset Waste Partnership;
- Deane DLO; and
- Crematorium.

(iv) Planning, Transportation and Communications (Councillor Edwards)

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

- Local Business Support and Networks;
- Supporting Inward Investment and Fulfilment;
- Place Based Regeneration;
- Marketing the Area through Culture;
- Marketing the Borough to Visitors;
- Other Activities; and
- Communications.

(v) Planning, Transportation and Communications (Councillor Habgood)

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

- Site Allocations and Development Management Plan;
- Neighbourhood Planning;

- Custom-build Register of Interest;
- Sport, Recreation and Open Space;
- Gypsy and Traveller Provision; and
- Car Parking.

(vi) 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.

(vii) Corporate Resources (Councillor Parrish)

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

- Corporate Strategy and Performance;
- Customer Contact;
- Facilities Management and Business Support;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development;
- ICT and Information;
- Transformation Programme Management;
- Southwest One (SW1) Succession Planning;
- Law and Governance – SHAPE Partnership Services;
- Electoral Services;
- Democratic Services;
- Finance and Procurement; and
- Revenues and Benefits Service.

(viii) Community Leadership (Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington)

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

- New Councillors;
- Retiring Councillors; and
- Community Leadership.

(Councillors Govier and Mrs Reed left the meeting at 9.09 pm.)

(The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.)