

## **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 15 December 2015 at 6.30 p.m.

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

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

### **1. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 29 September 2015 and 10 November 2015, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

### **2. Apologies**

Councillors Mrs Adkins, Appleby, Davies, Miss Durdan, Prior-Sankey, Ross and Mrs Tucker.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

Councillors M Adkins, Coles, Govier and Hunt 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. Councillors Gage and Stone declared prejudicial interests as Tone Leisure Board representatives. Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the Chairman of Governors of Queens College. 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. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as the owner of land in Taunton Deane. Councillor Coombes declared a personal interest as a Stoke St Mary Parish Councillor and as the owner of land at Haydon. Councillor Hall declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One.

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

(a) Jackie Calcroft, representing the Staplegrove Action Group (ROSAG), stated that she had recently used the Freedom of Information Act to

request information about the North Taunton Development from both Taunton Deane and Somerset County Council.

The information requested from Taunton Deane had been received along with an opportunity to meet with the Planning Policy Officer who had helped to clarify many of the rumours and reports that were abounding.

We also applaud the Executive for stating they could not support the proposed use of Manor Road and Corkscrew Lane as a means of access for the new development before completion of the Spine Road.

However our experience with Somerset County Council (SCC) had been somewhat different with information being refused under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. This did not inspire us with any confidence in the SCC and unlike our dealings with Taunton Deane, the many rumours regarding possible proposed junctions on both Staplegrove and Kingston Roads continued to cause residents consternation and frustration.

Taunton Deane must have had talks with County Highways about the proposed development and the roads. Given the SCC's unhelpful secrecy, would Taunton Deane be able to share information about the highways issues with regard to this proposed new development - in particular the width of the Spine Road and its connections with Staplegrove and Kingston Roads?

In response Councillor Habgood stated that he was unable to speak for SCC but undertook to contact them about the release of relevant information to the public.

- (b) Simon Briggs of the Whitmore Area Residents Group asked if the Council still needed these extra houses for Staplegrove? His understanding was that the original calculation was done very much on the basis of economic development over the years and asked for clarification that those exact numbers were still needed.

The latest version of the Master Plan showed the road going through the development actually following the northern route. Was it still the wish of the Council that that road should be completed in full before the development actually started?

The Master Plan also showed the Green Wedge along the line of the developer's original proposals. Had that been shared with officers, because the recommendation from several Committees was that the Green Wedge would only be reduced from what the authority would prefer on the basis of strong evidence and has that actually been provided?

Rag Hill was one of Staplegrove's most beautiful areas of land and he could understand the authority's wish to provide housing there but it would be extremely detrimental to the environment. As the Mayor of London, Boris Johnston proposed lying down in front of the bulldozer if a third runway is built at Heathrow, would any of the Councillors here propose to do something similar?

Councillor Habgood responded by confirming that the Core Strategy was the Council's adopted document and that it was due to be reviewed in

January 2016. This would establish whether the current number of dwellings proposed for North Taunton was the correct figure.

- (c) Mike Marshall, Vice-Chairman of Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council reported that the Council was being asked this evening to make a decision that would have far reaching effects on the village of Henlade, the shape of Taunton but would also have a tremendous impact on the future use of the planning process in Taunton Deane - all without either full information or debate. This related specifically to the use of Local Development Orders (LDO) for development sites in the Taunton area as an alternative to a review of the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan.

It was not mentioned in the heading of this item that you were also being asked to approve the preparation of a LDO for the strategic employment site. It did not even say where this site was - it made the assumption that you and the public knew. For information this proposed site was in open countryside in the parishes of Ruishton and Stoke St Mary outside of Taunton town boundaries adjacent to Junction 25 of the M5.

There were many unresolved concerns around this site. Somerset County Council had yet to agree road infrastructure; Highways England had no concrete plans for the Henlade By-pass, nor any route it might take. It was estimated that the site would generate 7,000 vehicle movements every 12 hours. Imagine therefore the extra chaos that this would bring to traffic through Henlade. There would also be additional air pollution to a designated Air Quality Management Area and extra chaos to the Tone Way and Creech Castle where bids for funding for road improvements had to date been unsuccessful.

LDOs were designed to bring forward brown field sites for housing not green field sites for employment. If this inappropriate use of an LDO was agreed then this Council would find that it would be subject to pressure from other developers to use LDO's on other green field sites and if not undertaken, they might feel disadvantaged enough to take other actions. Up until a couple of weeks ago this Council's publically stated intention was to handle this site through the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP) process and now with virtually no notice it was seeking to ditch this intention. Why?

The timescale to both processes given the work still to be done were virtually the same. Maybe because a LDO - unlike an SADMP - was not subject to examination in public by an Inspector; maybe there was a fear of such an independent examination?

Please be aware that despite statements from Councillor John Williams that there would be full public consultation we, from our previous experiences, were not assured by this. Even the detail of this recommendation before you tonight was not available to the public on the Councils website until yesterday!

It was essential that this Council acted in a consistent open and transparent manner in putting in place any LDO – these are Tim Burton's words not mine. The fact that the proposals to use a LDO on the strategic employment site was not apparent as an agenda item, therefore opens the matter to challenge - the fact that it was not appropriate to use a LDO on a green field employment site, the fact that this Council has not been given

all the facts or a chance for a full debate and the fact the decision is sought with indecent haste.

You should be properly briefed before even attempting to make such an important decision and accordingly there should be time for a proper debate by Full Council. The question tonight is, will this Council reject the Executive's recommendation to the use of LDO on the strategic employment site and request proper information and a separate and accordingly overt agenda item?

(d) Doug Lowe, Chairman, Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council

In February 2011 the Government published its final scheme designed in a policy relating to the New Homes Bonus. The aim of the bonus was to provide a financial incentive to reward and encourage local authorities to help facilitate housing growth. The five key principles of the policy were:-

- *Powerful* - the grant would be payable for the following six years, so the total would rise for at least the first six years. Additional grant funding would be available for affordable housing also for the six year period.
- *Simple* - for each additional home, local authorities would receive six years of grant based on the Council Tax, ensuring the economic benefits of growth were more visible to the local community.
- *Transparent* - it would be easy for Councillors, the community and developers to calculate and to see the early benefits of growth.
- *Predictable* - the scheme was intended to be a permanent feature of Local Government funding and would therefore continue beyond the six-year cycle. The design features had been kept simple and stable to ensure that expected rewards for growth were delivered.
- *Flexible* - Local Authorities would be able to decide how to spend the funding in line with local community wishes. The Government expected local Councillors to work closely with their communities – and in particular the neighbourhoods most affected by housing growth – to understand their priorities for investment and to communicate how the money would be spent and the benefits it would bring.

Did the community want the Council to spend the grant money on a LDO on green field land on an employment site off Junction 25 or on houses to reduce the shortage of affordable houses and starter homes for young people?

Additionally, I am astonished and horrified that Taunton Deane intended to spend a great deal of Council Tax payer's money over two years on enabling an initiative for the promotion of growth of this employment site, which as you would recall was the site that all the world wants to build on and move into!

The Parish Council had repeatedly been told that there are companies queuing up to build on this site. Were the developers going to make a contribution to anything? No! Needless to say I find the whole process extremely unsatisfactory and the scheme smacks of back door dealing. How would the people of Taunton see this? If you have so much spare cash, surely you will not be looking to increase the Council Tax next year?

We know one third of the site is on a flood plain and concerns have been raised with the Planning Department already.

I am therefore asking you tonight to reject item 10 that Councillor Habgood is recommending on behalf of the Executive.

Last but not least, and a very important matter, tomorrow night there will be a second meeting regarding welcoming Syrian refugees to Taunton. Could I encourage you all to increase the numbers of the people we would offer places to? These refugees were coming here with nothing, so let us open our hearts to them. All the local Churches were fully supporting them so it was an easy thing to do and other towns were doing a lot more than Taunton Deane was.

Councillor Habgood replied to both Messrs Marshall and Lowe by stating that there was no intention to use a Local Development Order to rush forward the development of the proposed strategic employment site off Junction 25. A great deal of consultation relating to this site had already been undertaken. Nevertheless, if a decision to use a Local Development Order in this instance was approved much more 'upfront' work and consultation would be undertaken to obtain the development this Council wanted. He confirmed that the site was very important to the future economic growth of Taunton Deane.

## **5. Proposed changes to the Constitution – Amendments to recommendations at the Planning Committee**

Following recent meetings of the Planning Committee, officers had been considering possible changes to the procedures under which Members of the Committee consider applications for planning permission, as set out in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution (Rules of Procedure).

At present, Part 4 paragraph 6 limited the range of potential amendments to substantive motions which might be proposed at Planning Committee. In particular, paragraph 6 stated that amendments as proposed "*shall not have the effect of introducing a significantly different proposal or of negating the motion*".

Although the current arrangements within the Council's Constitution operated well at Full Council and at most of the Council's Committees it was arguable that they did not align satisfactorily with the decision making process under which the Planning Committee determined applications for planning permission.

Specifically, paragraph 6 prevented Members from proposing that an application be refused where the officer recommendation was that planning permission should be granted.

On at least four recent occasions, Members – having voted down the recommendation to grant permission – were placed in a position where they then had to identify reasons which would support the refusal to which they had effectively already committed themselves.

This had the effect of depriving the Committee of the opportunity to discuss in detail potential reasons for refusal of the application – and if necessary obtain officers' advice on the issues – prior to the point at which Members had still to reach an overall view on the application.

It was therefore considered that such difficulties could be avoided in future by a straightforward amendment to paragraph 6 of the Rules of Procedure, insofar as it applied to the Planning Committee.

The effect of the proposed change would be to allow Members to propose a determination of any application in a manner contrary to the officer recommendation, subject to (a) any proposal being seconded and (b) the Member/s making the proposal indicating possible planning reasons for the proposal at the time that their proposal is made.

This proposal had been reported to both the Planning Committee and the Constitutional Sub-Committee where Member approval had been given.

**Resolved** that the proposed amendments to Part 4 paragraph 6 of the Council's Constitution – as set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes – be approved.

(Prior to the following item being presented, Councillors Coles, Horsley, James, R Lees and Mrs Lees declared prejudicial interests as either holders of a Blue Badge or had a partner who had a Blue Badge. Councillors Coles, James, R Lees and Mrs Lees took no part in the discussion of the proposal relating to Blue Badges but left the meeting before the vote was taken in relation to this matter. Councillor Horsley opted to remain present at the meeting during the vote but abstained.)

## **6. Council Fees and Charges – Parking**

Considered report previously circulated, which set out proposed changes to the charging process that supported traffic management of the urban areas of Taunton Deane by seeking to influence driver behaviour with the following outcomes:-

- Removing the incentive for long stay in the most central car parks freeing up space for shorter term stays; and
- Long term investment in the parking assets.

Parking charges had not been amended since 2011 but the costs of the operation had been increasing.

Parking assets had not had an adequately funded programme of maintenance for some years and the maintenance of assets had become reactive rather than proactive.

There were a number of strategic projects being considered such as pay on exit and variable message signage but as yet these were unfunded. The report therefore sought to identify a funding stream to support these enhancements through the following proposed changes:-

(a) **Car Park Tariff** – It was proposed to change the parking charges to a set hourly rate, using multiples of this rate for the number of hours required. Details of the current charges and those being proposed were set out in the Appendix to these minutes. The rationale behind this change was to make the charging profile clearer and removed the saving which was higher in the central car parks freeing up space for shorter stays and the higher turnover of bays.

(b) **Removal of Blue Badge Zero Tariff** – It was proposed to remove the zero tariff but if a valid Blue Badge was displayed and payment was made there would be an allowance of an additional 60 minutes.

(c) **Sunday tariff** – It was proposed to implement Sunday charging across all of the car parks that were currently chargeable.

The anticipated additional revenue would permit a significant investment to be made in the following elements of the Parking service:-

- Increased allocation to the maintenance budget to improve the overall condition of the public car parks thus reducing the risk of claims against the Council;
- A contribution towards the introduction of 'pay on exit' infrastructure and variable message signing;
- Project and Team resources to ensure delivery the increased level of maintenance works and the level of parking income modelling being requested by the Council; and
- Reconnection of the CCTV systems that were switched off a number of years ago.

Details of the estimated revenue position was set out in the following table:-

	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
<b>Pay and Display</b>	800k	800k	800k	800k
<b>Blue Badge</b>	60k	60k	60k	60k
<b>Sunday Charges</b>	60k	60k	60k	60k
<b>Subtotal of income</b>	920k	920k	920k	920k
<b>Maintenance</b>	150k	150k	150k	340
<b>Projects</b>	150K	150k	150k	0
<b>Project resource</b>	40k	40k	40k	0
<b>Team resources</b>	25k	25k	25k	25k
<b>CCTV</b>	22.5k	0	0	0
<b>On-going</b>	24k	24k	24k	24k
<b>Subtotal of investment</b>	411.5k	389k	389k	389k
<b>Income less investment</b>	<b>509k</b>	<b>531k</b>	<b>531k</b>	<b>531k</b>

Further reported that there were a number of risks attached to the proposals outlined above. These included:-

- (1) Parking income fluctuated throughout the year and could be the subject to external influences such as the weather or road works;
- (2) Because the Council did not currently charge for Blue Badge Holders or Sunday charging, a model had had to be produced that was a

- conservative estimate;
- (3) Uncertainty as to the level of enforcement Somerset County Council (SCC) would operate for on-street parking on a Sunday. This could have an impact on residents' parking permits which were not required on a Sunday where members of the public might seek to park in residents' parking zones and implications for traffic management in Taunton should Blue Badge Holders choose to park on double yellow lines – as entitled to do so – subject to any other restrictions which might prevent this.

Discussions with SCC were not far enough advanced to determine their view on these matters. Noted that SCC might need to extend the scope of their residents' permits to cover Sundays to mitigate this risk.

Further reported that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had discussed this matter at its meeting on 10 December 2015 where the proposed changes to the Car Park Tariff and the introduction of Sunday charging were supported but the removal of the zero tariff for Blue Badge Holders was not supported.

**Resolved that:-**

- (1) (a) The proposed changes to the Pay and Display parking charges as set out in the Appendix to the report (attached to these minutes) be supported;
- (b) The removal of the zero tariff for Blue Badge Holders be supported;
- (c) The proposal to work with Somerset County Council on the residents' parking consultation be approved; and
- (d) The investment package, as identified in the report, be also approved.
- (2) On the Mayor's casting vote, the introduction of a Sunday Tariff be not supported.

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

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an update on the construction project at Blackbrook Sports Centre and a request for additional funding towards fitting out the new facility and opportunities to progress some design changes.

The construction project itself continued to be managed within budget by the Council's construction partners BAM and they were making excellent progress on site.

The approved capital construction budget for the new pool project was £5,353,000 funded from a combination of resources from the Growth Reserve, General Fund Reserve and borrowing. In December 2014, a further



£398,000 had been approved which provided sufficient capital to enter into the construction contract.

There had been some minor unplanned costs that the Council had to deal with to date and the total of these costs were £26,000, plus £71,000 spent on progressing some affordable design changes to the benefit of the Council, whilst there was the opportunity. These had all been met by the Construction Contingency Budget.

This meant that this Budget was now fully utilised. In order to continue the construction project in a safe and risk appropriate manner, the Council needed to re-instate the Contingency Budget.

Together with Tone Leisure, the Council had conducted a full audit review of the St James Street site fittings to ascertain what items could be brought over to the new facility but much of the equipment was not suitable to be transferred. Other items were either at / or approaching the end of their functional life and not in keeping with a brand new facility.

The only outstanding issue for the Council to consider on this site was that of car parking. A transport study had been carried out in the earlier stages of the project, and now there was a desire to revisit this in light of a more detailed plan emerging for use of the facility. At this stage, it was not known what the outcome of this would be and a further report would be submitted to Members if necessary.

Further reported that the current total capital expenditure was £6,206,000 with the request for a further £218,000. This would take the projected capital expenditure to £6,424,000. This increase to the Capital Budget was recommended to be funded from New Homes Bonus Reserve. There was also an additional revenue resource needed of £24,000 for transition costs between facilities, which was included as it was a one-off revenue expenditure taken from the revenue underspends in the current financial year.

The new pool would provide the Council with a significant asset and it rightly needed to ensure it was getting the best it could for its funding. It was important that the asset should have a reasonable lifespan, and the Asset Management Team was advising and ensuring that the choices the Council made now were sensible for the operation of the asset during its life.

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The report be noted; and
- (2) The following requests for additional funding be approved:-
  - (a) A supplementary capital budget of £218,000 for the new Blackbrook Pool and Spa Pools Project, increasing the total capital budget to £6,424,000;
  - (b) The transfer of £218,000 from the New Homes Bonus (Growth) Reserve to add to the Revenue Contribution to Capital ("RCCO") budget to provide the funding for the capital supplementary

estimate above; and

- (c) The transfer of £24,000 from the 2015/2016 underspend to the Leisure Maintenance earmarked reserve, to fund the additional one-off transition costs in 2016/2017 financial year.

(Due to time constraints, it was agreed that the formal questions submitted prior to the meeting should not be dealt with in the usual way of the questions and responses being read out at the meeting. Councillors agreed though that both the questions and responses should be circulated outside of the meeting as well as being recorded in the minutes.)

## **8. Written Questions to Members of the Executive**

### **(1) Questions to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Simon Coles**

- (a)** In view of the decision by Somerset County Council to terminate their contract with Southwest One (SWO) early. Can Councillor Williams tell us where this leaves Taunton Deane and Avon and Somerset Police (ASP) with less than two years to go on our contract with SWO?
- (b)** Will Taunton Deane incur any additional costs for provision of services to Taunton Deane taxpayers? Where does this leave Taunton Deane in agreeing a strategy with regard to SWO? Where does this leave Taunton Deane in finding a common IT platform post SWO? What steps is he taking to ensure a smooth changeover in November 2017?

## **Reply**

Taunton Deane and ASP had separate contracts with SWO under which SWO were committed to continue delivering directly to us for the same price and so there would be no additional costs associated with providing the services. The Taunton Deane succession planning work was now largely complete and recommendations would be brought before Members in January for consideration. The succession planning review had included, as reported to Council on 31 March 2015, a review of the various SAP IT platforms and recommendations for the future.

- (c) Developing the Devolution Bid** - Am I alone in thinking that Paragraphs 5.6 to 5.13 of Councillor Williams's report add absolutely nothing to our collective knowledge of the Devolution Bid and gives us little or no insight to what action that this Council should be taking to "increase our productivity across the Heart of the South West"? I do not remember this being in the Tory manifesto nor do I believe it was exactly a hit on the doorsteps during the election campaign to put it mildly.

How does this Devolution Bid have any relevance to the daily services we are expected to deliver to the people of Taunton Deane? How does it help us to keep the streets clean, maintain open spaces and house the homeless? Does he agree with me that nearly all the orientation of the

work of the Local Enterprise Partnership is geared towards the larger urban areas making it more difficult for the Council to get leverage on the reduced amount of money now being made available to all local authorities for growth?

Will he admit that our participation in this process is in effect little more than window dressing towards assisting the Conservative Government in achieving its target of cutting the budget deficit and losing more jobs?

## **Reply**

The devolution proposals are only just emerging, so it is somewhat premature for Councillor Coles to jump the gun and turn this into a political debate and criticise the draft bid before it has even been shared. The development of the bid is a fast moving process involving Leaders of all authorities, of all political persuasions, in the heart of the South West area, all of whom have the best interests of their communities firmly in mind. I hope Members have read the various updates about the process of developing the bid that have been forwarded already. I also hope Members have had an opportunity to take a look at the presentation that was emailed out last week.

Can I remind Members that the draft bid will be considered by Full Council early in the New Year. That will be the time to debate the merits of the devolution bid, when we have something substantive to consider.

In the meantime – please can I urge all Members to read the updates that come to you and judge the proposals as they emerge on their potential merits for our communities.

## **(2) Questions to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jefferson Horsley**

### **(a) Hydrographic Office (UKHO) Paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3**

- (i) Why should the Leader believe the good news of the UKHO staying in Taunton is “incredible”? Does it not reveal a deep sense of insecurity on his behalf that he feared that they may actually leave Taunton and show how defensive he is in reality when the major effort he does is to retain businesses rather than seek to bring in inward investment? Do I have to remind him that over the past few years we have lost the market to Sedgemoor as well as the Police administration and custody units?

## **Reply**

Why should it not be incredible as it is incredibly good news for Taunton. Even John Humphrey the UKHO’s Chief Executive said he was delighted by the news.

- (ii) Our growth is supposed to be “job led” so can he reassure me that we

are going to obtain higher added value businesses which are going to lead to a higher wage economy for the district? Is it not more likely that we are going to rely more and more on retail units and care homes to supply us with low tech jobs that could belittle our status as the County Town? Is there not a danger that our aspirations to “think like a city” are not likely to be realised with this delusionary attitude?

## **Reply**

Our growth is producing jobs, nearly a 10,000 increase in economically active residents since 2005. I have no problem with the provision for the elderly and town centre locations has to be good.

### **(b) Hydrographic Office Iconic Sculpture**

Will the Leader of the Council use the good news that the UKHO is going to develop its own site for the future to Taunton's advantage by seeking to obtain a Section 106 Agreement when they submit their planning application for the rebuild, to have installed an iconic sculpture along the lines of Gateshead's Angel of the North on Creechbarrow Hill to signal the importance of Taunton as a Capital Town?

The large stone at the Hankridge roundabout entrance on the A358 can barely be seen in summer because it is covered by vegetation and if we are to think like a city then we should live up to our aspirations to show we mean business.

We could set up a competition as to what form this should take but do not let us be modest about our ambitions. Let us be positive.

## **Reply**

In terms of an “Angel of the North” on Creechbarrow Hill, public art is on the Council's Regulation 123 list so would have to be delivered through Community Infrastructure Levy rather than a Section 106 Agreement and therefore would come at the expense of other infrastructure such as new schools or strategic transport improvements. Members, your choice of priorities.

Section 106 funding can only be used in relation to matters that are essential for the development being proposed and where planning permission would otherwise be refused if they were not provided. An iconic statue on Creechbarrow Hill would clearly not meet this test. However, the planning team will be working with UKHO to encourage them to incorporate appropriate public art into any detailed redevelopment proposals.

### **(3) Questions to Councillor Mark Edwards from Councillor Habib Farbahi**

I wish to thank David Evans and his team for working on the Taunton Deane Business Conference to ensure smooth delivery.

### **Item 1.1 of Councillor Edwards's Report**

- (a) It was good to hear The Right Honourable Sajid Javid MP here in Taunton. His message, loud and clear was "your politicians do not create jobs, businesses create jobs". Can we therefore have an assurance that future conferences are more about providing a right platform and support for businesses rather than politicians?

### **Reply**

The conference was aimed at businesses with the joint aims of informing them about improvements to connectivity and investment opportunities, both of which are of enormous importance to business growth and investment. The invitation approach did result in the majority of attendees being from businesses and business organisations (c.100 out of 150 sign ups). General feedback from attendees has been extremely positive with businesses appreciative of the way the conference was constructed. In putting together next year's conference we will very much aim to deliver what businesses wished to hear about, and plan to use feedback to identify topics of interest.

- (b) With the public sector being the largest employer here in Taunton Deane and under further pressure from Central Government to come up with some 30% more efficiency savings, are you able to give the same commitment/assurances to safeguard their jobs?

### **Reply**

I am sure he is more than aware that this is not something that I could do, any organisation or business needs efficiencies and there is no certainty in any organisation or business.

We are committed to working with business and delivery partners to strengthen our economy – and as discussed at the conference, the evidence is that the economy here in Taunton Deane is performing very well with excellent prospects to do even better. Despite this, we operate in a free market economy and we are not in a position where we are able to give blanket assurances to protect jobs in any sector, as he well knows.

### **Item 1.2**

- (a) The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership is working with Sedgemoor District Council and the other local authorities responsible for the multi-site bid.

The enterprise zones are focused on two locations; Huntspill Energy Park near Bridgwater and the Exeter and East Devon Growth Point. Is Taunton Deane not missing out once again, and why was this not on yours and our MP's radar?

These two identified locations comprise a total of 437 acres across five sites, with the potential to support 17,800 new jobs over the next 25 years

and an additional £320,000,000 in GVA per annum to the UK economy by 2040.

## Reply

Taunton Deane was not missing out. We submitted an expression of interest for the Junction 25 site but this has yet to secure a planning approval and as such is a little too early to be considered as an Enterprise Zone. Regardless of this, it is clear is that the Junction 25 site offers huge potential for business locally and far afield and I hope Councillor Farbahi and his group will wholeheartedly support our proposal for a Local Development Order to be prepared for this site, so that the growth opportunities there can be fully realised.

- (b) In my view we missed the opportunity to tell business communities what services Taunton Deane can provide for both local businesses as well as inward investments. Do we have a one-stop shop that we can provide business with help and support here in Taunton Deane?

## Reply

As you are aware our team is available for any queries. We will be building on the current approach by following up on the LGA offer from the recent peer review to evolve our marketing approach based on best value. You will also note that we have recently earmarked £500,000 of New Homes Bonus to support this review. The conference also incorporated exhibition space, in which the Business Development team and other services were able to discuss on a one to one basis the support available.

### Item 1.5

- (a) It is excellent news that the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) is to remain in Taunton. Can we have the same assurances from both the administration and our MP that the Tax Office with 200 quality jobs will remain in Taunton?

## Reply

As you are no doubt aware the Tax Office is following a national approach of consolidating its services in regional cities over the next few years. The South West region will be based in Bristol.

Thank you for the recognition about the UKHO - it is indeed fantastic news that they are not just staying in Taunton, they are investing as a world leading business to further embrace digital technology and apply it to a wider variety of maritime purposes.

- (b) Why is it that we are always chasing businesses to remain in Taunton? Does that not make us feel that we are on the defensive, rather than expanding into new markets?

## **Reply**

The retention of existing businesses is important with these businesses investing in expansion. This is balanced against new investment as part of an holistic approach. There is a contradiction – in one breath he criticises the Council for not trying to change the mind of Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs in their consolidation, then criticises us for trying to retain business.

Councillor Farbahi is simply wrong.....we are constantly looking at new markets. Look at the Taunton Town Centre, where we have had numerous new occupiers take up residence, adding vitality and jobs to our town. Look at Rigid and other new occupiers at Westpark 26, for example. He seems intent on portraying a negative picture when the reality is quite the opposite. Yes of course there are challenges in any free market economy but as I said earlier, the business perspective – supported by data and independent peer challenge – is of a growing economy with excellent prospects for improvement.

### **Item 1.11**

I note that the Portfolio Holder seems to enjoy marrying businesses. This appears appropriate for this kind of work because as far as I can discern most of the Economic Development successes such as the Property Consortium at Culmhead are the result of a “wing and prayer” approach rather than any strategic policy. Does he also offer counselling for those institutions that have left or are considering leaving Taunton to avoid divorce? Even his prayers did not stop the Police administration going to Bridgwater. I hope they are more successful with the impending departure of the Tax Office.

## **Reply**

The Council has an active strategy to engage with all of the Taunton Deane's larger employers. We have worked closely with numerous larger employers, including Claims Consortium (the name was actually changed from Property Consortium UK a year or so ago!) to support their local growth plans.

### **Christmas Events**

Can you please tell the Council how much officer time, effort and funding are being spent on this year on year? Is it not time to tender this out to professional people as we have done with Somerfest? Does he agree with me that the Christmas Lights in Taunton Town Centre which I think are supposed to represent snowflakes falling look more like tears which is making a lot of us cry for effective leadership from this Council for town centre regeneration especially the High Street?

## **Reply**

In terms of the Christmas events and the approach, we are reviewing this and will provide a short update briefing in the New Year which will include a summary of the funding and time committed. As you will no doubt recall from

my previous statements we are keen for businesses and event organisers to deliver the Christmas events and raise funds for those. This year has been delivered in partnership with those organisations. In terms of the events generally as we have no funding allocated for events I am not clear how we would tender for those?

### **Coal Orchard**

I understand that Mace is the consultant commissioned by the Council. At the same time, Arts Taunton has commissioned their own consultants with public fund support doing roughly the same job. Are we not duplicating the use of tax payer's money on this single task?

### **Reply**

No. Mace were commissioned to deliver a business case for redevelopment of the Coal Orchard site. This has been completed and we are now proceeding to the next stage taking the project forward. Arts Taunton are looking at the viability and business case for a multi-purpose venue, which could be located at the Coal Orchard alongside a variety of other uses, but potentially other locations too. The two studies are entirely complementary.

### **Item 3. Asset Management**

Do you agree with me that this is a hugely important subject with Taunton Deane having some £64,500,000 worth of assets and revenue of some 0.9% year on year and has not changed for years?

When do you think we will be in a position to clearly understand what Taunton Deane costs are compared with our income so that we can make a decision to either keep / dispose of the assets accordingly?

### **Reply**

I have said many times before as did my predecessor much of the Council's General Fund portfolio is operational rather than income generating. Understanding the performance of individual assets of all types is critical to strategic asset management. It has been identified as a weakness and is being addressed through coding of property expenditure - introduced in 2014/2015 financial year with more work still to be done with improvements in 2015/2016, along with bringing together Property and Development under JMASS. More work is to be done but for 2015/2016 we should have fair data. Financial performance of categories of assets is already being assessed - something not easily possible in previous years.

The reality is that we will constantly endeavour to maximise any assets and their value and getting the best for the Council Tax Payer.

### **(4) Questions to Councillor Richard Parrish from Councillor Richard Lees**



### **Item 2.1 of Councillor Parrish's Report**

**The lift** - Due to the fact that the lift broke down recently, "this reinforced the need for an alternative accessible ground floor meeting venue". Where?

### **Reply**

There are various alternative options, for example St Andrews Hall or Blackbrook, but all are subject to availability. The solution needs to form part of our longer term accommodation solution.

**Item 3.4** – Could you explain to Councillors what the "learning pool" is?

### **Reply**

Learning Pool is a computer based e-learning solution. This allows users to undertake short training packages via their computer or electronic device and provides us, as the employer, with a record of training. This is particularly useful for areas such as equalities and diversity and health and safety where we need to undertake periodic refresher training. The training packages can be tailored to suit our local requirements. This is an addition to our existing training arrangements and more complex training requirements continue to be delivered by face-to-face training sessions. The Learning Pool solution has now been rolled out to all staff.

**Item 5.2** – Could we have more detail and who is to be the Partnership Manager?

### **Reply**

The manager is Nigel Hunt who currently works for Mendip District Council, but will move to Sedgemoor District Council, as the host authority for the partnership.

**Item 6. – Southwest One (SWO)** – Very little was said here – Is this because Somerset County Council (SCC) are pulling out of their contract and how does this impact on our contract?

### **Reply**

At the time of writing my report the SCC had not made a decision on their future relationship with SWO. Our working relationship with SWO has not changed and the options for continuity planning are still under consideration. The conclusions and recommendations from our options review will be brought to Scrutiny and Full Council in January 2016.

## **9. Recommendations to Council from the Executive**

#### **(a) Fees and Charges 2016/2017**

Consideration had been given to the proposed fees and charges for 2016/2017 for the following services:-

- Cemeteries and Crematorium;
- Waste Services;
- Housing Services; and
- Court Fees.

Details of the proposed increases were submitted. No increases were proposed to Land Charges fees, Licensing, Planning, Environmental Health, Promotional 'Rotunda Units', Building Control or in connection with Freedom of Information requests.

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 2016/2017 in respect of the Cemeteries and Crematorium, Waste Services, Housing Services, Licensing and Court Fees be agreed.

#### **(b) New Homes Bonus – Funding towards Growth and Regeneration Priorities**

Growth remained a top priority for the Council. This commitment had been reflected over recent years, with the allocation of New Homes Bonus (NHB) funding, primarily for growth and regeneration purposes.

Although it was accepted that NHB receipts would not be sufficient to fund schemes in total, the NHB funding could nevertheless provide an important 'match funding' contribution towards them, with support from other funding partners increasing the likelihood of delivery.

Since 2013, the Council had achieved significant success with partners in taking forward its growth priority and it was now appropriate for the Council to renew and refresh its plans for allocation of NHB, so that spending plans were aligned as far as possible with current and emerging growth priorities.

A number of growth spend categories were proposed, reflecting the priorities established in the Taunton Growth Prospectus and aligned with the relevant plans and priorities of key partners. Having such funds allocated would enable the Council to respond quickly to commercial and funding opportunities to support growth, which in turn would facilitate the realisation of Taunton's economic vision and key economic benefits.

The following table outlined a number of proposed growth spend categories and the NHB commitment proposed for each category.

### Proposed NHB Allocation and Indicative Spend Profile

Growth project / category	2016/17 £	2017/18 £	2018/19 £	2019/20 £	2020/21 £	Total NHB allocation £
Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation			1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	3,000,000
Major transport schemes	400,000	800,000	1,000,000	300,000		2,500,000
Town Centre regeneration	500,000	750,000	750,000	500,000		2,500,000
Employment site enabling and innovation to promote Growth		2,000,000	2,000,000			4,000,000
Urban Extensions		1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	4,000,000
Marketing, Promotion and Inward Investment	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	500,000
Preparation of LDOs	50,000	50,000				100,000
<b>Total NHB allocation</b>	<b>1,050,000</b>	<b>4,700,000</b>	<b>5,850,000</b>	<b>2,900,000</b>	<b>2,100,000</b>	<b>16,600,000</b>

<b>Estimated NHB receipt</b>	3,890,106	4,014,306	3,882,741	3,711,974	3,651,974	
<b>Less allocation to annual GF budget</b>	392,000	392,000	392,000	392,000	392,000	
<b>Indicative year end unallocated NHB balance (rounded)</b>	4,410,000	3,330,000	970,000	1,390,000	2,550,000	

The following were proposed as principles that would guide the spending of allocated NHB funds:-

- A Business Case for funding should be provided to the Director and relevant Portfolio Holder, justifying the proposed investment in terms of contribution to growth and regeneration priorities and/or the potential for financial return.
- NHB contributions for physical infrastructure projects should normally be used as match funding, or to attract match funding, from other sources as part of a total funding package.

- NHB funding in the above categories could be used to fund specialist expertise and project related costs that would be required to deliver key schemes, as well as costs associated with 'hard infrastructure'.
- The NHB funding allocation and indicative profile would be refreshed annually, to ensure that spending plans remained aligned with an evolving picture of external funding secured, opportunities for new funding and new growth priorities.
- The profile of spending shown was indicative. With approval of the Director and relevant Portfolio Holder, spend might fall outside of the indicative years shown, within the overall sum allocated for the category and subject to sufficient NHB balance being available.
- The principles for NHB spend did not apply to the Community Infrastructure Levy, for which separate governance arrangements had been established.
- Decisions on project spend within allocated budgets would be taken by the Director – Growth and Development, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the relevant Portfolio Holder.
- The Growth Steering Group would have an overview of all major spending on growth projects and additional monitoring by Councillors would occur through Budget Monitoring reports.
- Any significant single items of expenditure (with a value of more than £250,000) would be published in the Weekly Bulletin and therefore subject to the usual 'call in' process.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The principles of spending, as set out above, be approved;
- (2) The proposed allocation of New Homes Bonus in 2016/2017 budgets be approved (as part of the Budget approval process); and
- (3) The growth spend categories and proposed New Homes Bonus commitment for 2017/2018 to 2020/2021 be agreed and incorporated within the draft Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme (subject to annual review).

**(c) Sheltered Housing Service and Charges**

Taunton Deane Borough Council currently owned, managed and provided housing related support services to a total of 880 Sheltered Housing Council Tenants.

The Council's Sheltered Housing was currently comprised of two separate but highly related elements:-

- ‘Designated accommodation’ – This was a flat or bungalow, which was equipped with an interactive alarm system. The accommodation was paid for by tenants in the form of rent and service charges; and
- ‘Housing related support’ – This could include regular and occasional welfare checks that provided reassurance and a minimal level of social contact. This support service was paid for by Somerset County Council (SCC) grant funding.

Over the last few years the Council’s contract with SCC to provide housing related support to its Sheltered Housing Tenants had reduced significantly. Following a comprehensive review a new contract had been entered into by the Council to provide housing related support to its Sheltered Housing Tenants. The overall value of the new contract was £153,046.71 per year for the period October 2014 to October 2018.

In addition, SCC’s review had also redefined key elements of its service contract specification. As a result, Taunton Deane was having to make changes to the housing related support service it currently delivered to its Sheltered Housing Tenants which sought to help tenants to lead active and independent lives.

At present, the amount of weekly service charge a tenant paid for their Sheltered Housing service depended on the type of Sheltered Housing scheme on which they resided.

In the existing service charges, a tenant residing on a ‘low level scheme’ would receive less regular contact from staff and this would be classed as the baseline service. However, a tenant residing on a more ‘standard Sheltered Housing scheme’ might require more regular visits and increased contact.

The usual current service charges applied to Sheltered Housing Tenants rent accounts for 2015/2016 were shown below:-

<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Current weekly charge</b>
Sheltered housing	£12.59
Low level sheltered housing	£ 4.47
Current average sheltered service cost	£10.93

In the proposed new service a new single rate service charge would be applied to all sheltered housing tenant rent accounts from April 2016:-

<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Proposed new weekly sheltered housing service charge</b>
Additional housing management; Community Development and Tenant involvement and empowerment.	£10.93

The housing related support element of the proposed new service would continue to be grant funded by SCC and subject to a formal contractual agreement.

The actual cost of providing the Deane Helpline and Emergency Response services to Sheltered Housing Tenants was £4.43 per week at 2015/2016.

It was therefore proposed that this cost should be applied as a charge to all Sheltered Housing Tenants rent accounts, with the financial consequences being taken account of as part of the current review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

On the motion of Councillor Beale, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The proposed new Sheltered Housing Service model be adopted;
- (2) A flat rate Sheltered Service charge of £10.93 / week be adopted; and
- (3) The inclusion of a service charge of £4.43 / week for the Deane Helpline Service with those in receipt of Housing Benefit receiving full subsidy via the Housing Revenue Account be agreed.

**(d) Proposed Sale of Land at Greenbrook Terrace, Taunton**

The Executive recently considered a report concerning the proposed sale of 0.47 acres of land/buildings at Greenbrook Terrace, Taunton. The Council owned the freehold interest of the land.

The site was put up for sale on the open market from 25 August to 25 September 2015 with a large 'For Sale' sign erected on site for the duration of the marketing period. The site was also marketed through the local media..

Eight offers were received based on a number of different uses including residential development, mixed use development, garage use and community use.

A preferred bidder had been identified who had made an unconditional offer for the purchase of the freehold interest of the site.

On the motion of Councillor Edwards, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The proposed sale of land at Greenbrook Terrace, Taunton to the preferred bidder identified in the report to the Executive be approved; and
- (2) If the preferred bidder was to withdraw its bid, the second highest

offer as deemed appropriate by the Asset Manager and Portfolio Holder be proceeded with.

**(e) North Taunton Framework Plan and Development Brief**

The Council had been in discussions with the promoters of two major areas of land to the north of Taunton that had been allocated as a 'broad location' for future development in the Council's Core Strategy (adopted in 2011).

Since adoption of the Core Strategy, the Council had included the site for development in Policy TAU2 in the Council's Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP). The SADMP had reached an advanced stage and was subject to initial hearing sessions scheduled for the 1 and 2 December 2015 which had considered this proposed allocation.

As required by Policy SS6, the promoters had prepared a 'Framework Plan' to co-ordinate the planned development of North Taunton which they wished the Council to endorse as a basis for future development of the area.

The Framework Plan had been consulted upon earlier in the year and the latest version included amendments in a number of areas to take account of views expressed by the local community and key stakeholders.

The Executive had acknowledged that engagement with the developers needed to continue to ensure the development desired was obtained which included the provision of affordable housing and sufficient mitigation to limit its impact.

The proposed use of Manor Road and Corkscrew Lane as a means of providing access to the new development until the proposed Spine Road had been constructed was one particular issue the Executive was unable to support.

On the motion of Councillor Habgood, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The North Taunton Framework Plan and Development Brief be agreed as the basis for development with the strong preference for the northern alignment of the Spine Road noted, subject to the detailed alignment changes referred to in the report, and agreement of the precise location and design of the junction between the Spine Road and Kingston Road; alignment of the Spine Road to be agreed prior to the submission of any planning application; and
- (2) It be agreed that officers write to the site promoters outlining the need for the following matters to be addressed as the site came forward:-
  - (i) Proposals should demonstrate how the proposed Spine Road accorded with Policy TAU2 by providing for a future eastward extension to complete an orbital route around North Taunton, and the detailed alignment and design of the Spine Road should be agreed by

the Council who had already indicated a strong preference for the northern alignment;

- (ii) The design of the proposed Spine Road to demonstrate conformity with *Manual for Streets 1* and *Manual for Streets 2*, including provision for buses and cyclists;
- (iii) The portion of the West Deane Way within the development should be upgraded for shared use by pedestrians and cyclists, and similar consideration given to other existing rights of way within the development area;
- (iv) The promoters should agree with the Council what the sub-areas or 'neighbourhoods' within the development would be, and how a locally distinctive design treatment would be achieved for each one;
- (v) The promoters/developers be required to prepare detailed layout plans and design codes for each of the agreed sub-areas, and submit these to the Council, prior to the first reserved matters application for residential development;
- (vi) Strong evidence would be required to justify any reduction in the size of the proposed Green Wedge compared with that shown in the Council's Site Allocations and Development Management Plan;
- (vii) The indicative location of the local centre, school and employment areas be agreed, the precise locations to be dependent on the final alignment of the Spine Road and its junction with Kingston Road;
- (viii) Provision should be made within the proposed employment areas for small units suitable for business start-ups;
- (ix) The proposal should demonstrate compliance with Site Allocations and Development Management Plan Policy TAU2 in terms of the scale and mixture of uses in the proposed local centre; and
- (x) The electricity lines across the western part of the site (between the A358 and Whitmore Lane) be required to be placed underground.

(Councillor Coombes declared a prejudicial interest in the following item as a local landowner and left the meeting during its consideration.)

- (f) **The use of Local Development Orders for development sites in the Taunton area as an alternative to a review of the Town Centre Area Action Plan and a Development Plan Document for the Strategic Employment site adjacent to Junction 25 of the M5**

Local Development Orders (LDO's) had been introduced as a planning tool by way of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Order Act of 2004.

An LDO was a means of bringing forward land for development without the need for an individual planning permission being sought. Instead,



development which met the criteria set out in the Order would automatically be allowed. LDOs therefore could act as a catalyst to bring forward development and investment by providing certainty.

The process for preparing a LDO was rather complex. The Local Planning Authority had to undertake informal consultation outlining the policies it proposed to implement, the development permitted and the area to which the Order would relate. It had also to set out a 'statement of reasons' that established the reasons for making an Order based upon sound evidence.

LDOs could not be required to provide Section 106 obligations which meant that sites covered could not be obliged to provide affordable housing or other financial contributions in order to make development acceptable in planning terms. However, the Community Infrastructure Levy would still be applied.

There was no definitive process for putting an LDO in place once preparatory work on the Order and public consultation had been carried out. However, many Councils had already resolved to adopt LDOs at Full Council meetings since the Orders were effectively Council policy. It was proposed that Taunton Deane should follow the same route following detailed consultations with Members and the public.

It would appear that LDOs were a tool which the Government would increasingly expect Local Planning Authorities to use, particularly in relation to brownfield opportunities. As such, the Executive had considered a proposal to use LDOs for some of the redevelopment sites currently identified in the adopted Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TTCAAP) as well as an alternative to the single issue plan proposed for the Strategic Employment site at Henlade.

As the TTCAAP was several years old there was a need to review the assumptions made regarding key sites. However, by preparing LDOs for such sites the Council could reduce the amount of work involved when compared to a review of the Plan, whilst at the same time accelerating the redevelopment of key sites.

In addition to those sites in the TTCAAP, The Deane House site was also considered to be a site suitable for an LDO should it become available for redevelopment.

The preparation of an LDO for the Strategic Employment site off Junction 25 would not only accelerate the process, but would also have the advantage of being a marketing tool for potential occupiers who would have greater certainty over the appropriateness of their use and a quicker and easier process for resolution. The LDO route would still enable the local communities to be involved through consultation and to influence the outcome as would be the case if this site were to be brought forward through the preparation of a development plan as had previously been envisaged.

It was proposed to use the Homes and Community Agency Procurement Framework to procure consultants to undertake further scoping associated with the preparation of LDO's. It was proposed to allocate £100,000 of New Homes Bonus towards the cost of preparing a series of Orders.

On the motion of Councillor Habgood, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (a) The preparation of a series of Local Development Orders for a number of town centre sites as an alternative to reviewing the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and to seek specific authority to prepare Local Development Orders for the Strategic Employment site off Junction 25 and The Deane House site (should it become available for redevelopment) be agreed;
- (b) It be agreed that £100,000 of New Homes Bonus be allocated to support the preparation of Local Development Orders; and
- (c) The Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy and Transportation be authorised to approve the programme for the preparation of further Orders for Taunton Town Centre sites. Such schemes would then be presented to Members for approval following consultation.

**(g) Review of Council Tax Support Scheme for 2016/2017**

On 1 April 2013 Council Tax Benefit (CTB) had been abolished and replaced with a locally designed “CTS” (CTS) Scheme. The Government had 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. Initially, 90% of funding previously granted by the Government for CTB was provided for localised CTS.

Whilst the Council had discretion on the rules for CTS for people of working age, the Government had stipulated that pensioners should be fully protected under the same criteria that previously applied to CTB. The Government had also stipulated that, as far as possible, CTS for vulnerable groups should be protected too.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had provided funding through the annual Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) to help meet the cost of localised CTS schemes. Each of the major precepting authorities in Somerset received the initial funding based on their share of Council Tax receipts.

From 1 April 2014, funding for localised CTS had been merged into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Business Rates Funding Baseline and was not separately identified, but the SFA had reduced by 26.1% in cash terms in the two years up to 2015/2016, and was projected to continue to reduce significantly over the next four years.

A reduction of 26.1% would result in an overall budget of £4,423,358. If there was no change to the existing CTS scheme, it was estimated the Councils would award CTS of £5,515,725 in 2016/2017. This would mean a budget shortfall of £1,092,367, with Taunton Deane’s share of that shortfall being £105,086.

For people of working age, the scheme for 2015/2016 had a number of key elements namely:-

- Maximum support was 80% of Council Tax - everyone of working age had to pay something;
- Increased non-dependant deductions;
- No second adult rebate;
- Earned income disregards were at increased levels than those offered under CTB; and
- An Exceptional Financial Hardship fund of £35,000, through the Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability for short term help.

On 9 December 2014, Full Council had decided to continue the 2014/2015 CTS scheme for 2015/2016 with an amendment to disregard maintenance received for children.

However, with the reduced level of funding from the Government through the SFA, the Council had worked in collaboration with Somerset County Council (SCC) and the other Somerset District billing authorities to develop options to revise Taunton Deane's CTS scheme for working age applicants from 2016/2017.

Any local scheme had to be agreed with the major precepting authorities such as the SCC, Avon and Somerset Police and Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority by 31 January 2016.

Consultation with the precepting authorities and the public had taken place in respect of the following five options:-

**Option 1** – The Council to work out CTS in the same way as was done now. Any shortfall in the funding received and the CTS paid in 2016/2017 would need to be met from other Council budgets. Response – 32% in favour;

**Option 2** - Applicants with capital of over £6,000 would not be entitled to CTS. Response – 71% in favour;

**Option 3** – The Council to use a Minimum Income figure for those who were self-employed. This Minimum Income would be in line with the UK minimum wage for 35 hours worked. The Council would not apply this Minimum Income for a designated start-up period of one year to allow the business to become established. If a self-employed person was limited in the hours they could work, the Minimum Income would be worked out proportionately. This proposal would align our treatment of income for self-employed people with that used to work out Universal Credit. Response – 67% in favour;

**Option 4** – The Council to change the scheme to pay CTS at a level that would be no more than for a Band D property. This would not disadvantage any applicant who lived in smaller or lesser value property. Response – 69% in favour;

**Option 5** - The Council to apply a taper of 65% to the income of applicants with no earnings and apply a taper of 20% to people in work. This would mean two applicants on similar income levels, but where one was in work, would receive different levels of support. The applicant with no earnings would receive less CTS, compared to an applicant with earnings receiving the same weekly income. Response – 53% in favour.

There was no single option or change to the CTS scheme that could deliver sufficient savings to meet the predicted budget gap from the reduced RSG and Business Rates funding in 2016/2017.

The reality was that any revised scheme that reduced the amount of rebate awarded, needed to establish which applicants were more able to pay an increased level of Council Tax with the reduction in their CTS. The decision would be to choose what options were acceptable to the Council bearing in mind the overall level of finance available.

The welfare changes announced in the Summer Budget would have had a significant impact on the Council's CTS scheme. However, the Chancellor had since announced in the Autumn Statement, that proposals on Tax Credits to increase the taper and reduce the threshold would not now go ahead. As a result:-

- the tax credits income threshold would remain at £6,420 from April 2016; and
- the tax credits taper would remain at 41% of gross income.

8,514 people initially moved from the CTB Scheme to the localised CTS Scheme. As at 31 March 2015, this had reduced to 7,749. It was accepted this was primarily due to the gradual improvement in economic conditions as well as increases in the pension age.

The net collectable amount for Council Tax in 2014/2015 had increased by 6.2% in comparison to 2012/2013. The collection of Council Tax in year was at a similar level, with additional income for Taunton Deane of £303,000 based on its preceptor share of 9.66% in 2014/2015.

While it had been possible to maintain in-year collection of Council tax at 98% since the introduction of CTS, this had entailed significant extra work for Revenues Officers.

While working age CTS recipients represented 8% of households, the value of their debt was equivalent to 33% of all Council Tax outstanding at 31 March 2015 (£1,137,340).

Although, the collection rate had remained the same as the previous year, it had become clear that the volume of recovery action had again increased to ensure collection levels remained high.

Within the 2013/2014 Local Government Finance Settlement, the Government had included funding for CTS that included a proportion relating to Parishes and Special Expenses. The Council had previously decided to pass on a proportion of this funding to Parishes to reflect their reduction in funding as a result of CTS. For 2013/2014, a grant was given to Parishes based on the tax base reduction attributable to CTS in each Parish multiplied by their 2012/2013 Band D Charge.

Since 2014/2015 the Funding Settlement had not separately identified the proportion of funding for CTS for any preceptors - including Taunton Deane and Parishes so the Council had approved the principle of applying the same formula used in the previous year. This had meant each Parish's grant for

CTS was calculated as CTS Tax Base Adjustment x 2013/2014 Parish Band D Tax rate.

In view of the significant financial pressures, the Council needed to make difficult decisions in order to balance the budget and provide a sustainable financial future. It was therefore suggested that careful consideration should be given to the level of grant funding that was affordable in 2016/2017 and subsequent years to mitigate the CTS impact on Parishes, whilst recognising the impact on Parish budgets and potential local tax requirements. If funding was reduced Parishes would have the opportunity to consider whether to take action to reduce their costs and/or adjust the amount of precept levied on the local tax payer.

The amount of grant funding provided to Parishes and the Unparished Area in 2015/2016 totalled £45,000. The Council therefore needed to determine the policy for providing any CTS Grant funding to Parishes for 2016/2017. The following options for 2016/2017 existed:-

**Option (a)** - Use the same formula that was used for 2015/2016, so each Parish's grant for CTS would be calculated as:-

CTS Tax Base Adjustment x 2013/2014 Parish Band D Tax rate.  
This would reduce the budget requirement for CTS Parish Grants by approximately £420, to a total of approximately £44,580.

**Option (b)** - Use the same formula that was used for 2015/2016 as the baseline, but phase out the funding over two years, so each of the Parish grants for CTS would be calculated as:-

- 2016/2017: CTS Tax Base Adjustment x 2013/2014 Parish Band D Tax rate x 66%;
- 2017/2018: CTS Tax Base Adjustment x 2013/2014 Parish Band D Tax rate x 33%;
- 2018/2019: Nil – CTS grant funding ceases.
- 

This would reduce the budget requirement for CTS Parish Grants by approximately £15,300 in 2016/2017, £30,150 in 2017/2018 and by £45,000 in 2018/2019.

It was also recommended that the same funding principle agreed for Parishes should be applied to the Council budget for the Unparished Area Fund. Having taken account of the contents of the very detailed Equality Impact Assessment that had been undertaken, the Executive decided to agree the proposed amendments to the CTS scheme. However, option (b) – set out above – was the preferred option for the continuation of support over the next two years to the Parishes.

On the motion of Councillor Parrish, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) (i) Having regard to the consultation responses and the contents of the Equality Impact Assessment, the Council Tax Support Scheme be

amended to that shown in the separate Appendix 1 to the report – and illustrated in Model 9 – to reduce support for working age applicants in 2016/2017 by:-

- removing entitlement to applicants with capital over £6,000;
- applying a Minimum Income for self-employed applicants; and
- paying the Council Tax Support scheme at a level that would be no more than for a Band D property.

(ii) Option (b) be used in providing and calculating Council Tax Scheme Grant funding for Parish Councils in 2016/2017; and

- (2) It be noted that the 2016/2017 Council Tax Support Scheme was recommended for 2016/2017 only.

#### **(h) Financial Monitoring – Quarter 2 2015/2016**

The Executive had recently considered a report concerning the Council's financial performance for Quarter 2 of the financial year 2015/2016. A summary of the Council's Financial Performance during Quarter 2 was as follows:-

**General Fund (GF) Revenue** - The GF Revenue Outturn position was currently projected as a net underspend of £186,000 which was 1% below budget.

One of the main variances to the budget related to Rent Rebates. This service was reporting an underspend on budget of £114,000 and it was therefore proposed that £100,000 should be transferred into an earmarked Benefits smoothing reserve to mitigate against the effects of anticipated changes in the funding of the Pathway for Adults (P4A) service in 2016/2017.

The GF reserve balance at the start of the year was £2,109,000.

The Council had received New Burdens Grant funding amounting to £81,000 for property searches in November 2015. The Council had already set aside from revenue £101,000 for the repayment of personal searches and the Government had paid an interim grant to help mitigate the cost. It was proposed to transfer this sum to the GF reserve to offset the sum set aside.

**General Fund (GF) Capital** - The GF approved Capital Programme was currently £12,543,000. This related to schemes which would be completed over the next five years. Of this, Budget Holders were projecting that £8,412,000 was planned to be spent during 2015/2016.

**Housing Revenue Account (HRA)** - The current forecast outturn for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was an overspend of £102,000 (0.4% of budget).

As part of the continuing HRA Business Plan Review, the investment needed in the Council's homes over the next 30 years would be undertaken. However, this would require specialist surveys to update the Council's current stock

condition data at an estimated cost of £250,000. It was therefore proposed that a supplementary estimate should be added to the 2015/2016 budget, funded from general reserves.

This would reduce the HRA general reserves balance to £2,458,000 with a forecast of £2,356,000 at the end of the financial year.

**Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital** - The approved HRA capital programme was £23,459,000, of which £12,927,000 related to works on existing dwellings and £10,532,000 for the provision of new housing through development.

**Deane DLO Trading Account** - The DLO was not forecasting an over/underspend /over recovery after contributing £101,000 to the General Fund.

**Deane Helpline Trading Account** - The Deane Helpline was currently underspent on budget, forecasting a year end outturn net deficit of £40,000.

On the motion of Councillor Beale, it was

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The request to transfer the £81,000 New Burdens Grant income on Property Searches to the General Reserves;
- (2) The request to transfer the £100,000 underspend on Rent Rebates to a Benefits smoothing reserve to cover the potential effects on Housing Benefits of Pathway for Adults (P4A); and
- (3) A supplementary estimate in 2015/2016 of £250,000 funded from Housing Revenue Account reserves to commission a survey of the housing stock and the updating of the stock condition database,

all be approved.

## **9. 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:-

- Thank You to All Our Staff;
- Refugee Aid from Taunton (RAFT);
- Taunton Deane Business Conference;
- Firepool Regeneration Plans;
- Devolution Update;
- Strategic Employment Site Adjacent Junction 25;
- UKHO (UK Hydrographic Office);
- Autumn Spending Review;
- Budget Setting 2016-2017;

- Swimming Pool Project;
- Taunton North “Read Easy” Group;
- Refugee Crisis; and
- The Last Full Council before Christmas.

**(ii) Corporate Resources (Councillor Parrish)**

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

- Corporate Strategy and Performance;
- Facilities Management and Business Support;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development;
- ICT and Information;
- Joint Management and Shared Services (JMASS) and Transformation Programme Management;
- Southwest One (SW1) Succession Planning;
- Additional Priorities;
- Council Tax Support;
- Law and Governance – SHAPE Partnership Services;
- Electoral Services;
- Democratic Services; and
- Finance and Procurement.

(Following the decision not to suspend Standing Order 28 to enable the meeting to continue for a further half an hour, the Mayor suggested that any questions in relation to the following reports should be sent to the relevant Executive Councillors in writing outside the meeting. This was agreed.

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

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

- Safer Somerset Partnership;
- Data Sharing;
- Continued One Team Working;
- Taunton Town Centre Police Team;
- Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in Taunton Deane; and
- Refugee Aid from Taunton.

**(iv) Housing Services (Councillor Beale)**

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

- Deane Housing Development;
- Affordable Housing Delivery;
- Welfare Reform Visits;



- Discretionary Housing Payments;
- Benefit Cap;
- Rent Arrears;
- Universal Credit;
- Pathway for Adults – P4A;
- Refugees;
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan; and
- Pre-Void Inspections and Tenancy Enforcement.

**(v) Environmental Services (Councillor Berry)**

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

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

**(vi) Business Development, Asset Management and Communications (Councillor Edwards)**

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

- Supporting Business Growth – including The Taunton Deane Business Conference, UK Hydrographic Office, New Marketing Publications, Inward Investment Video, Investment enquiries, Taunton Visitor Centres and Christmas Events;
- Communications; and
- Asset Management.

**(vii) 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 (SADMP);
- Local Development Orders (LDO's);
- Neighbourhood Planning;
- Major Applications : Housing;
- Regeneration – Firepool;
- Strategic Employment – Site Adjacent to Junction 25;
- UKHO – The Hydrographic Office; and
- Car Parking – Refurbishment, Season Concessions, Activity and Fees and Charges.

**(viii) Sports, Parks and Leisure (Councillor Mrs Herbert)**

The report from Councillor Mrs Herbert dealt with activities taking place in the following areas:-

- Community Leisure and Play; and
- Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities – Health Development, Active Lifestyles and Facility News.

(Councillor Govier left the meeting at 8.52 pm. Councillors Coombes, Hunt and Stone left the meeting at 8.59 pm. Councillors Wren, D Wedderkopp and D Durdan left the meeting at 9.07 pm, 9.10 pm and 9.14 pm respectively. Councillors Horsley and Morrell both left the meeting at 9.20 pm).

(The meeting ended at 9.25 pm.)

## APPENDIX 1

### PROPOSED CHANGES TO PLANNING COMMITTEE RULES OF PROCEDURE

#### AMENDMENT TO CONSTITUTION PART 4 PARAGRAPH 6

REF	CURRENT	PROPOSED New text bold and underlined, text to be deleted struck through
Paragraph 6 Amendments	<p>(1) An amendment shall be either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(a) to leave out words;</li><li>(b) to leave out words or add others; or</li><li>(c) to insert or add words</li></ul> <p>but shall not have the effect of introducing a significantly different proposal or of negating the motion</p> <p>(2) Before moving an amendment a Councillor shall ensure that there is likely to be a seconder for that amendment</p> <p>(3) When an amendment has been moved and seconded no further amendments shall be moved until the first amendment has been voted upon</p> <p>(4) If an amendment is carried, it shall be incorporated into</p>	<p>(1) <b><u>With the exception of an amendment to an officer recommendation that planning permission be either granted or refused as contained in a report to the Council's Planning Committee (which shall be dealt with in accordance with sub paragraph (7) below) an</u></b> <del>An</del> amendment shall be either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(a) to leave out words;</li><li>(b) to leave out words or add others; or</li><li>(c) to insert or add words</li></ul> <p>but shall not have the effect of introducing a significantly different proposal or of negating the motion</p> <p>(2) Before moving an amendment a Councillor shall ensure that there is likely to be a seconder for that amendment</p> <p>(3) When an amendment has been moved and seconded no</p>

	<p>the motion which shall become the substantive motion upon which further amendments may be moved. If an amendment is voted down, further amendments may then be moved on the motion</p> <p>(5) With the agreement of any seconder and with the assent of the Council, given without comment, a councillor proposing a motion or amendment may:-</p> <p>(a) Withdraw that proposal; or</p> <p>(b) Alter its wording; or</p> <p>(c) Accept an amendment</p> <p>(6) If there is to be an amendment to the proposed budget then it must be received by the Democratic Services Manager by 12 noon the day before the Council meeting</p> <p>(7) In consideration of application for development under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) where an amendment is suggested in order to make the development more acceptable then the application will be deferred to the next scheduled meeting of the Planning Committee in order to ensure that all implications of the proposed amendment can be considered</p>	<p>further amendments shall be moved until the first amendment has been voted upon</p> <p>(4) If an amendment is carried, it shall be incorporated into the motion which shall become the substantive motion upon which further amendments may be moved. If an amendment is voted down, further amendments may then be moved on the motion</p> <p>(5) With the agreement of any seconder and with the assent of the Council, given without comment, a councillor proposing a motion or amendment may:-</p> <p>(a) Withdraw that proposal; or</p> <p>(b) Alter its wording; or</p> <p>(c) Accept an amendment</p> <p>(6) If there is to be an amendment to the proposed budget then it must be received by the Democratic Services Manager by 12 noon the day before the Council meeting</p> <p>(7) In consideration of applications <b><u>for planning permission or other form of consent</u></b> for development under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) <del>where an amendment is suggested in order to make the development more acceptable then the application will be deferred to the next scheduled meeting of the Planning</del></p>
--	---	--

		<p>Committee in order to ensure that all implications of the proposed amendment can be considered</p> <p>(a) <u>Sub paragraphs (2) and (5) of this paragraph 6 shall apply</u></p> <p>(b) <u>Sub paragraph (3) and (4) of this paragraph 6 shall not apply</u></p> <p>(c) <u>An amendment to the motion (with the term “motion” in this context being the officer recommendation in respect of the application) may have the effect of introducing a significantly different proposal or of negating the motion and maybe:</u></p> <p>(i) <u>That the application be determined as proposed in the officer recommendation but with the addition of further conditions and/or the removal or amendment of recommended conditions; or</u></p> <p>(ii) <u>That the application be refused (where the officer recommendation is for approval) or approved (where the officer recommendation is for refusal) PROVIDED THAT any proposer of such an amendment shall when making such a proposal identify the planning reasons for the amendment; or</u></p>
--	--	---

		<p>(iii) <u>That determination of the application should be deferred PROVIDED THAT any proposer of such an amendment shall when making such a proposal identify the reasons for the proposed deferral</u></p> <p>(d) <u>When an amendment has been proposed and seconded in accordance with sub paragraph (7)(c) it shall at that point become the substantive motion (on which further amendments may be moved in accordance with this sub paragraph (7))</u></p> <p>(e) <u>Where an amendment which has been proposed and seconded in accordance with this sub paragraph (7) is voted down, then at that point (and subject to any further amendment made pursuant to this sub paragraph (7)) the original officer recommendation shall be restored as the substantive motion</u></p>

## Appendix – The Council’s current and proposed charges across the car parks.

<b>Shopper 1</b>	<b>Up to</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Canon Street Coal Orchard	1 Hour	£1.20	£ 1.20
Crescent (maximum stay 4 hours) High Street	2 hours	£2.00	£ 2.40
Orchard Levels 1, 1A, 2, 2A, 3 and 3A	3 hours	£2.70	£ 3.60
	4 hours	£3.40	£ 4.80
	5 hours	£5.70	£ 6.00
	6 hours	£6.10	£ 7.20
	7 hours	£7.00	£ 8.40
	Over 7 hours	£7.60	£ 9.60

<b>Shopper 2</b>	<b>Up to</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Ash Meadows (maximum stay 3 hours)	1 Hour	£1.10	£ 1.00
Belvedere Road	2 hours	£1.80	£ 2.00
Castle Street	3 hours	£2.10	£ 3.00
Elms Parade	4 hours	£2.60	£ 4.00
Fons George (maximum stay 6 hours)	5 hours	£3.70	£ 5.00
Orchard Levels 4, 4A, 5 and 5A	6 hours	£4.40	£ 6.00
Wood Street	7 hours	£5.20	£ 7.00
	Over 7 hours	£5.90	£ 8.00

<b>Commuter Car Parks</b>	<b>Up to</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Enfield	1 Hour	£1.10	£ 1.00
Kilkenny	2 hours	£1.80	£ 2.00
Tangier	3 hours	£2.10	£ 3.00
Victoria Gate	4 hours	£2.60	£ 4.00
	5 hours	£3.50	£ 4.50
	6 hours	£4.30	£ 5.00
	7 hours	£4.60	£ 5.50
	Over 7 hours	£5.10	£ 6.00

<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Up to</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
South Street	1 Hour	£0.70	£ 0.70
	2 hours	£0.90	£ 1.00
	3 hours	£1.30	£ 1.50
	4 hours	£1.80	£ 2.00
	All day	£2.30	£ 2.50
Longforth Road	2 hours	£0.90	£ 1.00
North Street	3 hours	£1.30	£ 1.50
	4 hours	£1.80	£ 2.00
	All day	£2.30	£ 2.50

<b>Unchanged tariffs</b>	<b>Up to</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Whirligig	1 hours	£1.60	£ 1.60
	2 hours max	£3.00	£ 3.00
Tangier Coach Park	All day	£6.00	£ 6.00

