

## **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 17 March 2016 at 6.30 p.m.

Present        The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams) (In the Chair)  
Councillors Mrs Adkins, M Adkins, Aldridge, Berry, Mrs Blatchford,  
Bowrah, Coles, Coombes, Davies, D Durdan, Miss Durdan,  
Mrs Edwards, Edwards, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gage, Gaines,  
Mrs Gunner, Habgood, Hall, C Hill, Horsley, James, R Lees, Ms Lisgo,  
Morrell, Nicholls, Parrish, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Reed, Ryan, Miss Smith,  
Mrs Smith, Stone, Sully, Townsend, Mrs Tucker, Mrs Warmington,  
Watson, Ms Webber, Wedderkopp and Williams

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

### **1. Apologies**

The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hill) and Councillors Beale, Brown, Govier, Mrs Herbert, Hunt, Mrs Lees and Wren.

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

Councillors M Adkins, Coles, Prior-Sankey and Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Gage and Stone declared prejudicial interests as Tone Leisure Board representatives. Councillor Ms Lisgo declared a personal interest as a Director of Tone FM. Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the Chairman of Governors of Queens College. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as the owner of land in Taunton Deane. Councillor Hall declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Coombes declared a personal interest as a Stoke St Mary Parish Councillor and as the owner of land at Haydon. Councillor Parrish declared a personal interest as the District Councils' representative on the Somerset Pensions Committee.

### **3. Public Question Time**

(a) Mr Paul Partington stated that following the receipt of a petition in early 2015 for a bus shelter to be provided at Hither Mead, the Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council submitted a planning application for the new structure to the Local Planning Authority. The application was granted planning consent on 5 June 2015.

It had emerged in September 2015 that the planning site was a public open space with a covenant and it had taken Taunton Deane until very recently to obtain the necessary authority to issue the licence for the bus shelter.

As a result, Mr Partington asked the following questions:-

- (1) Why did it take so long for Taunton Deane to identify the land as an open space with a covenant?
- (2) Why did it take so long for the Executive to grant a license for the bus shelter?
- (3) Why had it taken many months for Taunton Deane to raise further issues before finalising the licence?
- (4) With regard to peoples' wellbeing, particularly the elderly and those with mobility issues, was it reasonable for the Council to take so long to issue the licence?
- (5) Does Taunton Deane support public transport, i.e. support the provision of facilities that are going to encourage public use?

In response, Councillor Edwards thanked Mr Partington for his questions and promised him a full written reply in due course.

- (b) Mr David Mitton referred to the current Electoral Review of Taunton Deane Borough Council by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

He understood that the functions of all Councils was changing rapidly due to massive cuts in funding and, as a result, the desire to divest themselves of non-statutory functions.

Whilst he recognised the importance of Councillors undertaking casework and the representational role they were often requested to carry out, he was of the view that Taunton Deane could manage adequately with a radical cut in the number of Councillors to around 40 instead of 56. What was the view of the Council?

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Williams, agreed that the number of Councillors should be reduced and that their duties also needed to be reviewed towards reducing the overall cost of democracy.

He added that the Council had suffered a 42% cut in income over the past few years but, despite this, the Council had maintained its front line services to the public.

#### **4. Mandate for Development of Transformation Business Case**

In November 2013 both Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and West Somerset Council (WSC) approved the adoption and implementation of the Business Case for Joint Management and Shared Services (JMASS).

The Business Case talked about the JMASS ambitions being progressed in a couple of phases:-

- (1) The initial phase, of delivering the “ONE Team” of officers to support both democratic bodies, was set out in detail in the original Business Case. This had been delivered ahead of time and within budget; and
- (2) The second phase, described simply as “Transformation” set out the potential for further financial savings to be delivered to both Councils. To date, a detailed Business Case had not yet been developed for this phase. Although confidence levels were high on the potential to deliver savings, the unknown was the appetite for change in either Council.

In order to shape the second phase, a series of Member Briefings had been held during 2014 and 2015, where Leaders from other Councils had shared their experiences of transformation prior to TDBC and WSC starting to shape their ambitions for change.

Before launching into the delivery of a major change programme, the Councils needed to test out two things – their Vision and Priorities for the future, and their Affordability.

### **The Vision and Priorities Project**

The output from the Vision and Priorities Project had enabled both Councils to agree a Corporate Strategy that not only set out the role and purpose of the Council(s) but agreed clear design principles which would shape the future transformation programme. There were a number of emerging themes that would need to be explored further (and resourced) before reaching the Business Case stage. These themes included:-

- Customer Access – The need to develop a Strategy that outlined how the Councils would work with customers and agree customer access principles that would ensure the approach was ‘customer centric’ in all that was done.
- Systems and Processes – The need to agree the approach to reviewing and redesigning key systems and processes, how this would be prioritised and delivered and what support would be needed.
- People – The need to develop a People Strategy that outlined how the work, the workforce and the workplace needed to adapt to meet the design principles.
- Members and Governance – The need to develop the support for the role of Elected Members to truly empower work in localities and enable them to fully operate as advocates for the Council.
- Accommodation – The need to agree the Accommodation Strategy that supported the transformation vision.
- Commercial Approach – The need to outline the approach and resourcing needed to move to a position where the Councils could be more business-like.

### **The Affordability Project**

The Affordability Project was designed to challenge the robustness of the Councils' Medium Term Financial Plans (MTFPs), and whether a transformation programme would deliver sufficient savings to achieve financial sustainability for either or both Councils.

This was important as the impact of the Business Rates appeal on Hinkley B Power Station had had a significant impact on WSC's level of reserves and ongoing income forecasts from Business Rates. The output from this was the 'Bill Roots Report' which had concluded that:-

- TDBC had General and Earmarked Reserves and had not used the vast majority of its New Homes Bonus (NHB) to fund day to day services. The Council would need to take tough decisions to balance its budget but this together with transformation should enable it to do so.
- WSC had only minimum General Fund Reserves, and minimal Earmarked Reserves and had used almost all of NHB to fund day to day services.
- The impact of the Hinkley Business Rates appeal had caused a dire financial position for the Council in the short and medium term.
- Longer term, should Hinkley C be built and start generating power - and the existing Business Rates rules applied – then the Council would benefit from additional funding. The timing of this was however too late to resolve the current problem.
- Were it not for the impact of the appeal outcome WSC could in all likelihood have balanced its books going forward by a combination of further savings and transformation.
- WSC was not therefore considered viable going forward unless special measures were implemented.

Further reported that with support, the Councils had developed a strong case to the Government setting out the unique nature of the circumstances that WSC faced, and had formally requested support. The key messages in the case were:-

- That the circumstances were quite unique and not down to anything the WSC, or Government or EDF had done wrong;
- Both WSC and its partner TDBC were good well run Councils that had delivered what was required by the Government. The Councils were ready for further transformation and integration but the financial viability issue was a serious hurdle to overcome; and
- The request from WSC was to be “put back” to the financial position it was in before the appeal. Although this would not eliminate the financial challenge, it would put it back to an achievable position.

Although the case had been supported by senior politicians in the Local Government Association, the Local Government Minister, Marcus Jones, who had met a delegation of Councillors and officers in January 2016 had made it clear that there would be no additional resources from the Government to WSC. He had requested that other options be explored – in particular he mentioned “merger” – and left the door open for further conversations when a plan for this had been prepared.

Therefore, the current baseline “facts” the Councils needed to move forward from were that:-

- WSC was not viable without special measures;
- The Government was currently unwilling to offer additional support; and
- Both Councils needed to progress with their transformation ambitions to achieve financial sustainability.

The recent briefings to Councillors in both authorities had given informal support on a way forward that would test the ability of the Councils to transform.

Reported that the Councils now had, through the approved Corporate Strategies, clear design principles that provided the means of being able to move forward and formally test the ability to transform through the development of a high level Business Case.

This would articulate the Transformation Vision and test the delivery of this in three sequential “variants”:-

- (1) As now, with two separate Councils supported by the ONE Team;
- (2) In one merged Council (TDBC and WSC), supported by the ONE Team; and
- (3) As two separate Councils with their own transformation agendas.

The three variants would be developed simultaneously to ensure the Councils reached a decision point as quickly and safely as possible. It was envisaged this work would take 3-4 months and would report in June - July 2016.

The first two variants would leave the ONE Team support arrangements in place – albeit to be reorganised as part of the transformation programme. The third variant would present a challenge to the ONE Team approach.

The first two variants, and the stand-alone third variant for TDBC only would follow a similar organisational model – focussing on the design principles agreed in the Corporate Strategies. This was likely to deliver a very different organisation to that in place now - completely reorganised to truly be customer centric, to support Councillors in their role as “active advocates” in their areas, to promote self-service, and to minimise governance and be risk aware rather than risk averse.

The third variant for WSC would be distinctly different and the ambitions and design principles set out in the Corporate Strategy were unlikely to be entirely affordable or deliverable.

Noted that the resources required to deliver this to high level Business Case could be funded from existing JMASS approvals. Delivery plans on this, together with the funding required would be shared with and endorsed by the Joint Partnership Advisory Group (JPAG) throughout this period.

Moved by Councillor Coles, seconded by Councillor Miss Smith that the proposed recommendation (b) be amended to read “Subject to recommendation (a) above, to authorise and prioritise the development of a

high level Transformation Business Case that only tests the two Councils progressing their own transformation agendas”.

In accordance with Standing Order 18(2)(b), the Mayor called for a formal roll call of votes to be taken and recorded in the Minutes.

The amendment was put and was lost with thirteen Councillors in favour, thirty against and one abstaining, as follows:-

Yes	No	Abstain
Councillor Aldridge	Councillor Mrs Adkins	Councillor Ms Lisgo
Councillor Coles	Councillor M Adkins	
Councillor Farbahi	Councillor Berry	
Councillor Mrs Floyd	Councillor Mrs Blatchford	
Councillor Horsley	Councillor Bowrah	
Councillor R Lees	Councillor Cavill	
Councillor Morrell	Councillor Coombes	
Councillor Nicholls	Councillor Davies	
Councillor Prior-Sankey	Councillor D Durdan	
Councillor Miss Smith	Councillor Miss Durdan	
Councillor Mrs Smith	Councillor Mrs Edwards	
Councillor Stone	Councillor Edwards	
Councillor Wedderkopp	Councillor Gage	
	Councillor Gaines	
	Councillor Mrs Gunner	
	Councillor Habgood	
	Councillor Hall	
	Councillor C Hill	
	Councillor James	
	Councillor Parrish	
	Councillor Mrs Reed	
	Councillor Ryan	
	Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams	
	Councillor Sully	
	Councillor Townsend	
	Councillor Mrs Tucker	
	Councillor Mrs Warmington	
	Councillor Watson	
	Councillor Ms Webber	
	Councillor Williams	

Members went on to discuss the recommendation as set out in the report. The Mayor announced that separate votes on the two parts of the recommendation would be taken.

In accordance with Standing Order 18(2), the Mayor called for a formal roll call of votes to be taken and recorded in the Minutes for both parts of the recommendation.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, recommendation (a), which is detailed below, was put and was carried with thirty Councillors in favour, thirteen Councillors voting against and one abstaining:-

- (a) **Resolved** that the Council's continuing commitment to a core, exclusive and on-going long-term Joint Management and Shared Services Partnership between Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the Inter Authority Agreements dated 15 November 2013 be confirmed;

Yes	No	Abstain
Councillor Mrs Adkins	Councillor Aldridge	Councillor Ms Lisgo
Councillor M Adkins	Councillor Coles	
Councillor Berry	Councillor Farbahi	
Councillor Mrs Blatchford	Councillor Mrs Floyd	
Councillor Bowrah	Councillor Horsley	
Councillor Cavill	Councillor R Lees	
Councillor Coombes	Councillor Morrell	
Councillor Davies	Councillor Nicholls	
Councillor D Durdan	Councillor Prior-Sankey	
Councillor Miss Durdan	Councillor Miss Smith	
Councillor Mrs Edwards	Councillor Mrs Smith	
Councillor Edwards	Councillor Stone	
Councillor Gage	Councillor Wedderkopp	
Councillor Gaines		
Councillor Mrs Gunner		
Councillor Habgood		
Councillor Hall		
Councillor C Hill		
Councillor James		
Councillor Parrish		
Councillor Mrs Reed		
Councillor Ryan		
Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams		
Councillor Sully		
Councillor Townsend		
Councillor Mrs Tucker		
Councillor Mrs Warmington		
Councillor Watson		

Councillor Ms Webber		
Councillor Williams		

On the motion of Councillor Williams, recommendation (b), which is detailed below, was put and was carried with thirty Councillors in favour, thirteen Councillors voting against and one abstaining:-

(b) **Resolved** that the development of a high level Transformation Business Case be authorised and prioritised that tested the following sequential options:-

- ONE Team supporting two Councils (Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council);
- ONE Team supporting a merged Council (Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council); and
- Two Councils progressing their own transformation agendas.

Yes	No	Abstain
Councillor Mrs Adkins	Councillor Aldridge	Councillor Ms Lisgo
Councillor M Adkins	Councillor Coles	
Councillor Berry	Councillor Farbahi	
Councillor Mrs Blatchford	Councillor Mrs Floyd	
Councillor Bowrah	Councillor Horsley	
Councillor Cavill	Councillor R Lees	
Councillor Coombes	Councillor Morrell	
Councillor Davies	Councillor Nicholls	
Councillor D Durdan	Councillor Prior-Sankey	
Councillor Miss Durdan	Councillor Miss Smith	
Councillor Mrs Edwards	Councillor Mrs Smith	
Councillor Edwards	Councillor Stone	
Councillor Gage	Councillor Wedderkopp	
Councillor Gaines		
Councillor Mrs Gunner		
Councillor Habgood		
Councillor Hall		
Councillor C Hill		
Councillor James		
Councillor Parrish		
Councillor Mrs Reed		
Councillor Ryan		
Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams		
Councillor Sully		



Councillor Townsend		
Councillor Mrs Tucker		
Councillor Mrs Warmington		
Councillor Watson		
Councillor Ms Webber		
Councillor Williams		

(The meeting ended at 8.11 p.m.)