

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 11 April 2017 at 6.30 p.m.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams)
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Prior-Sankey)
 Councillors Aldridge, Beale, Berry, Mrs Blatchford, Bowrah, Brown,
 Cavill, Coles, Coombes, Davies, D Durdan, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gage,
 Gaines, Govier, Habgood, Hall, Henley, Mrs Herbert, Mrs Hill, Horsley,
 Hunt, James, R Lees, Ms Lisgo, Morrell, Parrish, Mrs Reed, Ryan, Mrs
 Smith, Sully, Townsend, Mrs Tucker, Mrs Warmington, Watson,
 Wedderkopp, Williams and Wren

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

1. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Adkins, M Adkins, Booth, Miss Durdan, Edwards, Mrs Gunner, C Hill, Mrs Lees, Martin-Scott, Nicholls, Ross, Miss Smith, Stone and Ms Webber.

2. Minutes

Subject to Councillor Mrs Hill's apologies being recorded, the Minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 23 February 2017, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

3. Communications

The Mayor drew the attention of Members to the following:-

- (i) Councillors were requested to return their completed Related Party Transaction declarations as soon as possible to the Finance Section;
- (ii) A large number of Easter Eggs had already been collected for distribution to the Taunton Association for the Homeless later in the week. It was not too late for further eggs to be donated if Councillors wished to do so;
- (iii) The Citizenship Award Ceremony was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 26 April 2017 in the County Room at the Somerset County Cricket Club. Councillors were welcome to attend; and
- (iv) Councillor Habgood would be participating in a 100 kilometre walk over the hills surrounding Taunton Deane on 22 April 2017 to raise funds towards the Musgrove Park Hospital Scanner Appeal. If anyone wished to sponsor him, they were encouraged to contact him direct or sign the sponsorship form in Democratic Services.

4. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Prior-Sankey (Deputy Mayor) declared a personal interest as a Friend of Hestercombe. She also declared a prejudicial interest as the

Hestercombe Gardens Trust was to be one of her charities when she became Mayor of Taunton Deane next month. She left the room during the discussion of agenda item No. 8. Councillors Cavill, Habgood, Mrs Herbert, Mrs Hill, Horsley, Sully, the Joint Chief Executive, the Director – Operations and the Democratic Services Manager also declared personal interests as Friends of Hestercombe.

Councillors Coles, Henley, Hunt, Prior-Sankey and Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Bowrah, Brown, Cavill, Gaines, Govier, Henley, Hunt, James, Mrs Reed, Mrs Stock-Williams, Townsend, Mrs Warmington and Watson all declared personal interests as Members of Town or Parish Councils.

5. **Public Question Time**

- (a) Councillor Adrian Jones of Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council drew attention to the continuing delay in Section 106 Agreement financial contributions being released to improve play facilities in the Parish. This unfortunate situation had been running since 2005 and the Parish Council was increasingly frustrated with the delay in the funding – which amounted to over £300,000 - being made available to them.

Councillor Jones had dealt with a number of officers over the years who had all promised to move the matter forward but, for various reasons, had not been able to do so. The time had arrived whereby someone had to be accountable for this sorry situation. He therefore asked Councillors to intervene.

In response, Councillor Habgood stated that he was aware of some of the background to this matter. Once he had been fully briefed by officers he would be happy to meet up with representatives of the Parish Council with a view to resolving the issue.

- (b) Beverley Milner-Simonds drew the attention of Members to the forthcoming 'Eat Taunton' event on 12 and 13 May 2017.

She was aware that many local people had no idea of the quality of food produced by local businesses. The idea of the event was to showcase up to 60 primary food producers, all within 25 miles of Taunton to persuade people to shop locally rather than travelling further afield.

A launch party had been arranged on 26 April 2017 and this would be followed by a small 'taster' event on Castle Green on the evening of 11 May 2017 to celebrate Somerset Day.

The main 'Eat Taunton' event would take place over the next two days between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. also on Castle Green.

Ms Milner-Simonds asked Councillors to accept the invitation to attend the launch party and the event itself and provide feedback on what they had experienced.

The Mayor thanked Ms Milner-Simonds for her entertaining presentation/'question'.

- (c) Mrs Dorothea Bradley requested Councillors to engage with their residents to:-
- (i) Explain simply what Taunton Deane was trying to do for them; and
 - (ii) Listen and respond to members of the public.

This was partly about perception but it was important as it was very much where we were now.

The 21st Century - even in Taunton - was a different world, with the Government's Top Down approach which had been in existence since the end of the Second World War seemingly being rejected by way of the last General Election and then the EU Referendum.

So we were now left with the Bottom Up approach which would involve us all; hence my request for dialogue and communication. The younger generation saw themselves as entrepreneurs, refusing to support a system (including Councils) which they felt was obsolete but, nevertheless, still wished to make a difference. Currently, people felt blocked off from contributing.

Therefore, Mrs Bradley asked Councillors to:-

- Acknowledge emails – preferably responding to them where possible; and
- Keep their residents informed about what was going on and encourage them to attend Consultations.

In response, Councillor Williams stated that a huge amount of information was already communicated by the Council and that the Transformation process currently being undertaken would result in better engagement with the public.

6. **Appointment of Section 151 Officer**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the appointment of another Section 151 Officer in the light of a change in working arrangements.

Members had previously been notified that certain changes were being made in relation to the current roles of the Senior Management Team which included the current Section 151 Officer - Shirlene Adam (Director – Operations) who was being seconded to work full time to direct the Transformation Programme.

As part of the arrangements to accommodate this change, it was recommended that Paul Fitzgerald – who already acted as Deputy Section

151 Officer – should be moved from his current Assistant Director – Resources post to provide the Section 151 Officer role for the Council.

As required under the Constitution, the Council was required to agree the proposed change which if agreed, would be implemented no later than 21 April, 2017.

Resolved that Paul Fitzgerald be appointed as Section 151 Officer for the Council.

7. **Proposed Loan to the Hestercombe Gardens Trust**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a proposal to provide a capital loan to the Hestercombe Gardens Trust (HGT) of up to £80,000.

The loan would provide leverage to enable Hestercombe House and Gardens to take the next steps in delivering an £8 million investment in the site through the creation of the Hestercombe Centre for Arts and Landscape.

The development was likely to be funded from a range of sources including the Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council for England, Membership subscribers and match funding to an endowment.

The Arts and Landscape Project aimed to create an exciting new centre which would enhance the garden's offer and widen its appeal with the following elements:-

- Creation of 12 Artists' Studios in an underutilised wing of Hestercombe House;
- Creation of a new associated retail outlet;
- Linked Exhibitions which showcased this new output in addition to general access to the public to see artists at work;
- Conversion of the former head gardener's house known as Combe Lodge to create 12 units of accommodation to be used by visitors and artists; and
- Creation of a new garden for the 21st Century.

It was anticipated that the new project would enable the HGT to build on its exiting visitor base enhancing the £4 million spend which they delivered to the local economy and, in the process, move the House and Gardens forward consolidating it as a major regional and national visitor attraction

As with any investment this was not risk free, however the risks were considered to be acceptable. There were financial benefits for the Council, particularly through increased investment income. This would be augmented by the leverage with other organisations that the loan would create.

Reported that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had debated the issues and the principle of making the loan at its meeting on 23 March 2017. The debate covered a range of issues but the main points raised were on the issue of security and the proposed fixed interest rate of 2.75%.

At the meeting, the Hestercombe Finance Director explained that the Heritage Lottery Fund and other key funders required first charge and indeed these were in place on the House. However, there was wider value in the HGT holdings which would become available if Hestercombe failed which was an unlikely eventuality.

In terms of the issue of the interest rate, Members were advised that this proposal had been made based on financial modelling, the nature of the development and the context of this loan being 'seed funding' for wider development. Nevertheless, the Committee requested the Executive and Full Council to review this rate prior to any decision.

The Executive had duly considered this request but had noted that the proposed loan offer had been subject to financial modelling and sensitivity testing. The Executive was therefore of the view that the rate was proportionate to the development and should not be altered.

Resolved that:-

- (a) The principle of a 10-year fixed rate unsecured investment loan to Hestercombe Gardens Trust of up to £80,000 at beneficial terms to the Council be approved; and
- (b) An £80,000 Supplementary Budget in the Council's 2017/2018 Capital Programme in respect of the loan which was to be treated as capital expenditure, to be financed by revenue resources utilising uncommitted funds within the Business Incentive Earmarked Reserve, be also approved.

8. 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:-

- Submission to the Government – Proposal to Create a New Council;
- Transformation Programme;
- Toneway Funding;
- Defibrillator Funding;
- Affordable Homes for Rent;
- Connecting the Deane Digitally;
- The Brewhouse Theatre 40th Anniversary;
- University of Somerset;
- Junction 25 Upgrade and Dualling of the A358; and
- Broadband Installation and Progress to date.

(ii) Corporate Resources (Councillor Parrish)

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

- Corporate Strategy and Performance;
- Customer Contact Service;
- Facilities Management;
- HR and Organisational Development;
- ICT and Information;
- The Mayoralty and Democratic Services;
- Electoral Services;
- Southwest One Exit and SAP Replacement;
- Finance and Procurement – Financial Year End and New Finance System; and
- SHAPE Partnership Services – Law and Governance;

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

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

- Community Defibrillators;
- New Text Number to help combat Rural Crime – 07492 888109;
- Halcon One Team Coordinator; and
- Customer Care Training.

(Councillor Ms Lisgo declared a personal interest as a member of the North Taunton Partnership during the discussion of the above item.)

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

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

- Deane Housing Development – Creechbarrow Road, Taunton; Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington; Laxton Road, Taunton; 12 Moorland Close, Taunton – Community Centre and 3 units plus 4 unit conversion at 121-123 Outer Circle; Oake; Off-Site Manufacture; Development Pipeline; and Photo-Voltaics;
- Welfare Reform – Discretionary Housing Payment and Universal Credit; and
- Anti-Social Behaviour Service – Performance and Casework.

Councillor Beale also announced that a total of 284 affordable homes had been provided in the Taunton Deane area during the past financial year.

(Councillor Henley declared a personal interest as an employee of the Department of Works and Pension during the discussion of the above item.)

(v) **Environmental Services and Climate Change (Councillor Berry)**

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

- Environmental Health – Food Hygiene Inspections; Private Water Supplies; Air Quality; Safety Advisory Groups; Anti-Social Behaviour; Dog Fouling Issues; and Staffing;
- Licensing – Performance; Appeals; Ombudsman Complaint; Service Request Trends; and Reducing Red Tape for Businesses;
- Street Sweeping and Toilet Cleaning – IdVerde Contract;
- Somerset Waste Partnership – Recycle More; Easter Collections; and Taunton Priorswood Recycling Centre; and
- Cemeteries and Crematorium.

(vi) **Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Culture, Tourism and Communications (Councillor Edwards)**

The report from Councillor Edwards covered:-

- Business Development - Launch of Nexus 25 – Strategic Employment Site at Junction 25; Heart of the South West Productivity Plan; Nuclear South West Inward Investment Group; Brewhouse Sponsor; Taunton Deane Business Awards; and Launch of the University Centre for Somerset;
- Destination, Events, Retail Marketing and Visitor Centre – Destination Marketing, Events; Retail Marketing; and Visitor Centre;
- Town Centre Regeneration - Coal Orchard Redevelopment;
- Asset Management Service General Fund Activities – Estate Management Work; and Asset Strategy Work;
- Media, Marketing and External Communications.

(vii) **Planning Policy and Transportation (Councillor Habgood)**

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

- Planning Policy Team in line for National Honours;
- Neighbourhood Planning – Trull and Staplehay;
- Placemaking – Garden Town;
- Planning Development – Firepool; Coal Orchard; Staplegrave; The M5 Strategic Employment Site at Junction 25 – Local Development Order; and Planning response to the Housing White Paper;
- Transportation – Car Parking Performance; and Car Park Works;
- Highways England A358 Dualling;
- Cycling;
- Taunton Town Centre Public Realm; and
- West Somerset Railway.

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

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

- Parks and Open Spaces;
- Community Leisure – Play and Recreation; Summer Sunday Bandstand Concerts; Fields in Trust – Centenary Fields; and Monkton Heathfield New Community Hall; and
- GLL (Taunton Deane) – Community Sport
 - Teenage Yoga for Mental Health; Buggy-a-cise; Hillside Children's Centre Swimming Case Study; Zumba for Wellbeing; Trampolining for Wellbeing; February Heart Month; Children's Activity Day; Wellsprings Hosts Somerset Humdinger Half and Hurtle; Lyngford Park Primary School Consultation; Mayor Presents Olympic Medallists with Local Awards; Fit and Fed Training; Walk Well in Wellington; and Volunteers in Play.

(Councillors Morrell, Govier, Henley and Farbahi left the meeting at 7.44 p.m, 8.12 p.m, 8.30 p.m and 8.44 p.m. respectively.)

(The meeting ended at 8.53 p.m.)