

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Shire Hall, Shuttern, Taunton on 3 October 2017 at 6.30 p.m.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Prior-Sankey)
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Herbert)
 Councillors M Adkins, Mrs Adkins, Aldridge, Beale, Berry,
 Booth, Bowrah, Brown, Cavill, Coles, Coombes, Davies, D Durdan,
 Ms K Durdan, Edwards, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gage, Gaines, Govier,
 Mrs Gunner, Habgood, Hall, Henley, C Hill, Mrs Hill, Horsley, Hunt,
 James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, Ms Lisgo, Morrell, Nicholls, Parrish,
 Mrs Reed, Ryan, Mrs Smith, Mrs Smith-Roberts, Stone, Sully,
 Townsend, Mrs Tucker, Mrs Warmington, Watson, Ms Webber,
 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 11 July 2017 and 26 July 2017, copies having been sent to each Member, were both signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Blatchford, Cossey, Martin-Scott and Ross.

3. Communications

- (i) The Mayor drew the attention of Members to the annual Soroptomists' Charity Swimathon which would be taking place on the weekend of 17 and 18 February 2018.

She invited Councillors to consider raising at least one team of six to raise money for St Margaret's Hospice, Taunton Food Bank and the local branch of MIND.

An e-mail would be circulated to all Councillors in due course with full details and hoped support for this event would be forthcoming.

- (ii) Councillor Williams presented a gift to the Council. It was a picture titled "101 Tauntonians" from a 1930 sketch produced by Mr L H Key. It was thought there were about 30 produced at the time but not known how many survived to this day.

This picture was owned by Dr Mark Hubbard and hung in his Church Square Surgery for many years. When the surgery closed, the picture was rescued by Mr Stephen Hubbard, son of Dr Hubbard, who arranged for its restoration to ensure it was saved for future

generations.

As Mr Hubbard now lived away from Taunton, he had passed the picture on to Dr Phil Penny with the request that it be found a prominent location where it would be on public view.

Dr Penny had now offered the picture to the Council. Councillor Williams reported that he had sincerely thanked Dr Penny for considering us as the recipient of the picture and to Mr Hubbard for his efforts in restoring what was a subtext record of times gone by.

He hoped the Council would support the sending formal letters of thanks to both Mr Hubbard and Dr Penny and to assure them we would find a prominent location on public view to display this treasure.

- (iii) Councillor Cavill drew attention to the latest edition of the publication 'Taunton Life'.

Not only did it contain numerous photographs of Taunton and its locality submitted by readers, but its editorial – which was read out by Councillor Cavill - set out a variety of reasons as to why the County Town and all that it offered should be celebrated.

4. **Declaration of Interests**

Councillors Mrs Smith and Mrs Smith-Roberts both declared personal interests as they had relations who lived in the area of the North Taunton Development.

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

5. **Public Question Time**

- (a) Mr David Orr reported that he had written to the Local Government Secretary of State Sajid Javid opposing the planned merger of this Council with West Somerset Council. A copy of that letter had already been distributed to all Councillors.

He went on to say that the Council was tonight sharing a facility with the County Council. Sadly, this was a temporary arrangement whilst The Deane House underwent an expensive makeover, which would not be reflected in the uplift to the value of The Deane House once completed.

Next door was County Hall with significant spare space that had also undergone modernisation and was a ready-to-go office.

I would have supported a cost-neutral sale of both County Hall and The Deane House to be replaced with a new and iconic shared building at Firepool, to kick-start the development of that derelict brownfield site and to bring to Taunton some architecture that reflected the status of a County Town.

Here in Somerset, austerity showed no signs of letting up after more than eight years. This had resulted in substantial cuts to services such as Children's Centres and Care Homes being closed, bus routes being reduced and roads suffering from lack of maintenance.

Despite all these community service cuts and clear voter fatigue with austerity, we still had in Taunton two public sector offices within 10 minutes' walk of each other. Both were capable of accommodating the Police and other partners. This was costly with unnecessary duplication of overheads in buildings, IT and people.

Dorset had shown leadership and vision by calling in the Boundary Commission to improve public service delivery and reduce the implicit waste and inefficiencies in having nine Councils divided into two confusing tiers of Local Government.

On the other hand, Somerset with the Conservatives overwhelmingly in control, had not shown the same vision and leadership. Why not?

Mr Orr added that he had opposed the merger of Taunton Deane with West Somerset Council from the outset because the proposal lacked ambition and scale and would therefore lack long-term financial sustainability.

He hoped that the Secretary of State would take note of the sincere points in his letter and bring in the Boundary Commission for a whole-Somerset review of how public services were organised and delivered across the County.

Somerset deserved a less parochial approach to defending an indefensible and costly six council two-tier status quo when austerity and key community service cuts continued.

In response, Councillor Williams thanked Mr Orr for his comments and promised a written response to him in due course.

- (b) Mr Roger House, representing the Victoria Park Action Group, reported that he had written to the Council last December to ask if the 1980s designed pavilion public toilets could be added to the Councils Capital Programme for replacement. Since receiving a brief acknowledgement nothing further had been heard from the Council.

It was not like there was no funding available. There had been housing redevelopments at Victoria Gate and Wilfred Road with developer contributions for the park and play equipment.

He had also discovered following the sale of an area of land along the old Wilfred Road that the Council's Green Infrastructure Strategy stated that 80% of income from green space sales should be retained by the Parks.

The park toilets were used by local families and town workers and the park itself was a day centre for many in overnight hostels. The need to improve the facilities was therefore a continuing issue.

In response, Councillor Mrs Herbert stated that the Playing Pitch Strategy, which hopefully would be approved by the Council later on, could well result in additional funding being 'levered in' to improve facilities in the local parks and open spaces.

With regard to the Victoria Park toilets, she would soon be meeting with officers and would find out how far investigations into this matter had reached.

- (c) Jackie Calcroft reported that it had only taken 3.5 months for tenders to be sought and a contract let for the refurbishment of the Council offices. However, it was now over 17 months since the Council had agreed to raise car park charges to introduce electronic signage and the introduction of 'Pay on Exit' arrangements in most of its main car parks in Taunton Town Centre.

She asked why some projects seemed to take very little time to award a contract whilst others – such as the work to the car parks – appeared to take an inordinate length of time to bring forward. She went on to ask where the Council was with the tendering process for the car park improvements and when motorists would actually see the benefit from the increased charges?

Councillor Habgood replied by stating that this joint project with Somerset County Council had been delayed as a re-tendering exercise had had to be undertaken.

However, following the receipt of new tenders a contract for the installation of the main part of the signage had been entered into and works were expected to commence in January/February 2018. The introduction of 'Pay on Exit' would immediately follow the new signage.

He added that part of the delay was scheduling the works to avoid the busy 'run up' to Christmas and the New Year Sales so traders in the town would not be adversely affected.

- (d) Mr Gideon Amos stated that last year, instead of a full costed review of all the options for local government reorganisation in Somerset and before any public consultation was held, a decision was instead taken by the Council to merge with West Somerset Council, an insolvent Council.

The consultation that was subsequently carried out showed that the

vast majority of the members of the public opposed the merger.

But despite this the decision is pushed forward.

Now the Somerset County Gazette, is reporting a statement issued by this Council which reports a meeting held between the Conservative Leaders of Taunton Deane Borough and West Somerset Councils with the Conservative Secretary of State which discussed, according to a statement issued by this Council, the deferral of the 2019 Borough elections.

Deferring or delaying elections is a very serious matter in any democracy.

Can the Council give an absolute assurance that this Borough will not be brought to an end as we know it by the merger before members of the public and Council Taxpayers have had their first opportunity, to have a chance to vote in the 2019 Borough elections which will be their first opportunity to cast a vote on this issue?

In response, Councillor Williams said claims that we, as Leaders of Taunton Deane Borough and West Somerset Councils, asked the Government to postpone local elections in 2019 are 100% untrue.

The request was not made before, during or after the meeting. The issue was, briefly raised at the meeting with the minister following a suggestion from Whitehall civil servants but was neither pursued nor discussed. To claim otherwise is wrong.

Our letter in June suggesting a meeting with the minister makes our position clear: Naturally we are keen to re-engage both at a political and officer support level to ensure we develop a strong and deliverable plan for achieving a new District Council for our area.

Our commitment to achieve this remains as strong as ever.

Our proposal, if supported and approved by the Government, will deliver a more resilient local government solution for our area in time for the local elections in 2019. To do this we need your support.

From the outset, we have been working on a timeline for the May 2019 local elections. It is not for us to suggest a change to the timing of elections – and we did not do so.

Claims that we acted otherwise are unfounded.

- (e) Alan Debenham stated that he was opposed to the creation of a new Council covering the Taunton Deane and West Somerset areas as a matter of principle. Nevertheless, he would be interested in knowing what the result of the public consultation had been. He understood that many of those who had responded were against the 'merger'.

Mr Debenham went on to refer to the recent meeting of the Planning Committee which had considered the applications for residential development in the Staplegrove Area of North Taunton. If this was eventually agreed, it would amount to further urban sprawl.

He added that he understood that the Core Strategy was currently not up to date and that Government Housing targets had already been met. This meant that the additional development in Staplegrove was not necessary. When was development going to end – it was ruining our County Town?

Councillor Habgood responded that the Core Strategy was constantly being updated and added that the Government had just launched a consultation on Housing Objectively Assessed Need.

He understood that local residents were concerned about development, however the proposals for Staplegrove had been included in the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan for several years. He went on to say that new housing – particularly affordable housing – was necessary as there were over 2,000 people currently on the Council's housing waiting list.

In terms of the formation of a new Council, Councillor Williams stated that from a combined population of over 140,000, just over 500 responses to the public consultation had been received. He acknowledged that most of these responses were against the proposal but that this represented only a very small percentage of the whole population.

(f) Mr Nigel Behan asked the following questions relating to Taunton Deane's Constitution and Contract Procedure Rules:-

(1) Would paragraphs 6-9 (on pages 184-185 of the Constitution) be suitably updated to take account of the fact that the Southwest One/IBM contract was ended early by Taunton Deane in 2016/2017?

(2) With regard to the Acceptance of quotations and tenders (P189):-

(i) What tender award criteria ratio – if any – (e.g. 50:50) were usually applied (price, quality etc.) when considering evaluations? and

(ii) How were Best and Social Value taken into account and also how were Environmental and Sustainability issues factored/weighted when considering procurement evaluations?

Councillor Parrish said he would investigate the matters raised and promised to send Mr Behan a full response in due course.

6. Submission of Petition – Proposed Cycle Link via the Boulevard, Firepool, Taunton

Ms Pip Sheard of the Taunton Area Cycling Campaign (TACC) presented a petition containing 517 signatures to the Council.

She explained that the Firepool development was a once in a lifetime chance to provide a high quality cycle link to Taunton Town Centre from the Station, via the proposed Boulevard through Firepool. However, the Council had already indicated that cyclists would not be able to use the Boulevard, unless walking.

Instead, an alternative longer route was being proposed which involved two crossings at the Northern Inner Distributor Road and which bypassed the main areas of activity (going past the car park). The City of Bristol had already shown how cycling could be accommodated in the context of the Boulevard.

Station Road was one of the 15 hotspots for cyclists from the 2016 survey. The Boulevard would enable people to avoid it, if heading to the town centre and beyond.

Providing poor quality cycling infrastructure was not consistent with the ambitions of Taunton's Garden Town status. On behalf of those who had taken the trouble to sign the petition, TACC therefore asked the Council (as promoters of Firepool) to reconsider its policy for the Boulevard and design it so that it could be safely used by both people walking and cycling.

In response, Councillor Habgood thanked Ms Sheard for the petition which would be passed on to the relevant officers. He congratulated TACC for their involvement and looked forward to working with them in the future to try and find a solution to the issue raised.

7. Playing Pitch Strategy

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS).

The PPS played a number of important roles in sport, leisure and planning terms. At its basic level, the PPS provided an audit of the quality, quantity and accessibility of playing pitches, establishing the current levels of demand and projected forward demand likely to arise by the end of the strategy period, so that the appropriate level of pitch provision could be planned for the future.

The document also set out a “direction of travel” with a number of detailed actions, recommendations and options for pitches which provided greater clarity to stakeholders (such as clubs, providers, owners and managers of pitches) and bodies (such as the Council, sports governing bodies and Sport England) to enable them to work together on the delivery of pitches and facilities going forward.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) considered that sustainable development was one which supported strong, vibrant and healthy

communities. Key to that was a high quality built environment that supported its health, social and cultural well-being.

The NPPF stated that to deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needed, planning policies and decisions should:-

- plan positively for the provision....,
- guard against the unnecessary loss....,
- ensure that established...facilities...are able to develop and modernise in a way that was sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community; and
- ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

The Government's Planning Practice Guidance referred to open spaces (including playing pitches) which provided health and recreation benefits to people living and working nearby, as well as its ecological value and its contribution to green infrastructure.

The production of the PPS follows the established, National Governing Body (NGB) backed, Sport England PPS Methodology. The assessments looked at all sports which used a playing pitch including Football, Rugby, Hockey, Cricket, Rounders and Polo. A list of pitches in Taunton Deane was set out in the Appendix to the report.

The project encompassed:-

- Surveys of all playing pitches (grass, sand and artificial) had been undertaken during the playing season to ascertain the quantity and quality of the playing pitches;
- A survey of all local clubs about their current training and match requirements, future expansion plans and the club perspective on pitches used;
- A survey of those who owned and maintained the playing pitches to understand the quality of playing surfaces and any planned or identified improvements;
- A survey of NGB's to understand their views on teams and facilities in Taunton Deane;
- Tailored engagement with the wider community and Members to understand any key issues around pitches or ancillary facilities;
- Studying the demographic of Taunton Deane now and up to 2028, looking at how that growth was distributed across the settlements in the District; and
- Interrogation of all the data listed above to provide the Council and Local Stakeholders with a clear understanding of the quantity and quality of existing playing pitches, current and future deficits in the availability of playing pitches and options for addressing that shortfall.

The PPS evidence collection had taken almost 12 months, because it was important to survey pitches during their playing season. The data and

information collected had then been fact-checked to ensure that it had been accurately recorded. The raw data had then been shared with Members at an informal briefing and then with the NGB's and Sport England.

The PPS proposed an increase in playing pitch provision standard of 0.21 ha per 1,000 population, from 1.21 ha to 1.42 ha to reflect growth and change in Taunton Deane between now and 2028.

Detailed recommendations had been set out in the PPS for Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey and a range of other sports.

The Strategy was not a blue print - it provided options to help unlock solutions. The Strategy process was: plan, monitor and manage and repeat going forward.

The next step was exploring and testing the options with NGB's and local stakeholders to establish which were geographically and financially viable.

Resolved that the Playing Pitch Strategy be formally adopted to provide weight and enable it to be used by the Council, National Governing Bodies and local stakeholders across sport, leisure and planning to collectively protect, enhance and provide playing pitches in Taunton Deane.

8. **Deane Helpline Funding – Change to the Capital Programme**

Considered report previously circulated, which sought approval to alter the Capital Programme to support the purchase of replacement lifeline equipment which was required following BT infrastructure upgrades.

Deane Helpline customers were reliant upon lifeline equipment to support the monitoring and response service from Taunton Deane's Control Centre based at Kilkenny Court.

The service had around 1800 customers. Lifelines were supplied by the Council and loaned to the customer whilst they had a contract with us, and returned upon completion of that contract.

Due to the age of some of the lifelines, a schedule of replacing these units, starting with the older generation units first, had already been implemented within the budget currently available.

Reported however that BT had recently started infrastructure upgrades across the area and this had created problems with the reliability of the older lifeline models with many faults being reported including:-

- Jamming the main BT line into the property;
- Potential for alarm call not to go through to the Control Centre;
- Microphone in machine not working; and
- Customer's landline not working.

With the exception of the issue with the microphone in the units, all the other issues were in direct relation to the upgrading of the telephone lines by BT.

Because of the age of the machines, they were no longer compatible with the new generation of telephone wiring and were beginning to fail at a rapid rate.

This meant that replacement was needed with new units as the repair or upgrade of the existing units was not possible.

Noted however, that such a replacement programme was now becoming unmanageable within the current budget.

Therefore, in order for Deane Helpline to continue to offer the best possible service to its customers and guarantee their safety the Council urgently needed to replace 953 units that were failing.

Equipment changeover would be managed through Lifeline Officers swapping over equipment as it became faulty within the usual 48 hour period and through the planned contact visits with service users.

Resolved that:-

- (a) A supplementary estimate of £94,347 to the Capital Programme be approved to meet the cost of replacing lifeline equipment; and
- (b) The transfer of £94,347 from the capital financing reserve/revenue underspend identified in 2017/2018 be also approved to fund this work.

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

(i) From Councillor Coles to Councillor Williams

In light of the recent meeting that yourself and Councillor Anthony Trollope-Bellew requested with Sajid Javid and we understand took place on 7 September 2017 regarding the merger and your request that the Government should postpone the election scheduled for May 2019. could you consider answering the following questions:-

- Did he not consider informing the Council before he went ahead with the request for the meeting?
- Did he not appreciate that he has placed the role of the Chief Executive in an awkward position as she has to act in the interest of all the Councillors not simply the ruling group?
- When will the Leader allow the residents of Taunton Deane to express their view on this proposed merger with West Somerset?
- When will local residents be told of the true cost to Taunton Deane of this proposed merger?
- Considering the fact that this proposed merger with West Somerset is the largest change in Local Government terms for the residents of Taunton Deane since the reorganisation in 1974 (Act of 1972), why does the Leader think it only merits a single line in his report to Council?
- What price Democracy? What is he trying to hide from the electors? What right does he have, indeed, what justification does he have, to

attempt to delay the 2019 Borough Elections?

- It would appear to be merely for his own convenience. Or is it to hide the massive costs and giving away of Taunton Deane's assets to a financially challenged neighbour?
- Is democracy worth so little to him and his acolytes compared with his grandiose, politically motivated plans?"

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

Unfortunately Councillor Coles seems to be labouring under a misapprehension. We did not arrange to meet the Secretary of State to request a postponement of the 2019 election. Furthermore, in meeting with the Secretary of State I am only fulfilling the resolution approved by Full Council in July 2016.

All residents of Taunton Deane were given the opportunity to consider the Business Case and express their views. As Councillor Coles should be aware consultation ran from 12 December 2016 to 28 February 2017 with many alternative means of communication.

The full costs and benefits, of the proposed merger formed part of the consultation with a "Business Case" presented to all Members and our Community. Again this was made available in hard copy or on our website.

As the above clearly demonstrates, far from hiding facts from our residents we have been open and transparent at all times and, if the information provided is read and understood, the benefits to both Councils become readily apparent.

His final comment is not worthy of a response, but I challenge Councillor Coles and others against our proposals. Where will you make the savings necessary to keep us viable, sustainable and able to maintain vital front line services so valued by our community?

Since 2013 the One Team working has delivered the projected savings of £1,800,000 per annum, so enabling us to continue the valued front line services we provide. Can Councillor Coles tell us how he will afford these if, as he seems to want, he ceases working with West Somerset?

Add to this the projected savings of forming a single Council of £3,100,000 per annum and the importance of proceeding with the planned proposals become readily apparent, rather than trying to constantly undermine them.

(ii) From Councillor Horsley to Councillor Williams

With regard to the Taunton Economic Advisory Board (TEAB), would the Leader please explain to the Council what the role of this undemocratic body plays in the life of decision making on economic matters in Taunton Deane?

How does he see it evolving as a result of the paper circulated to both officers and Members by HYAS for their meeting held on 4 September 2017? Does

he agree that both its composition should be widened to include a better gender balance and its remit strengthened to include Taunton Deane as a whole and to embrace social, environmental and sustainable goals as well as economic ones?

Does he recognise that bodies such as this are viewed with deep suspicion by the public at large unless there is transparency - the publication of agendas and of the notes of the meeting thereafter that could be released to the public? Would it not make sense for the TEAB to hold an "open day" for the public and for an explanation of the relationships which exist and pinpoint the useful role that it plays and hopes to do in the future?

Will he guarantee that he informs the Council of any proposals that could involve Council funds will be taken through the scrutiny process before involving the views of the TEAB? I will remind him that the loan made to the Somerset County Cricket Club of £1,000,000 for their new communications suite to make the ground compliant for international One Day Internationals and 20/20 matches came as a fait accompli back in 2012?

Will he also assure the Council that he will not use the TEAB as a means of subverting the role of our Corporate (Land Use) Strategy whether agreed or in redraft to bypass for economic grounds alone projects which may well not meet sustainability from environmental, social, heritage and the built environment point of view?

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

The Taunton Economic Advisory Board has been in existence since 2004. As the name suggests, its role is advisory and as such it does not make any decisions which fall within the democratic remit of this Council, the County Council or any individual partners.

The Board has an independent Chair and comprises partner agencies across public, private and voluntary sector bodies. It is not a Council constituted body but nevertheless provides a valuable opportunity for partners to discuss key issues affecting the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Taunton. Partners are currently reviewing the role of the Board following Taunton's designation as the South West's first Garden Town.

I am very puzzled by Councillor Horsley's comments about this Council's loan to Somerset County Cricket Club. Far from being presented as a fait accompli, the matter was discussed at Community Scrutiny Committee on 6 November 2012, followed by the Executive on 14 November 2012 and finally decided upon by Full Council on 11 December 2012. Any similar decisions in future will also ultimately be made by Full Council.

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

(a) Taunton Deane Borough Council Corporate Plan 2017/2018

Earlier in the year, the Executive considered a report which introduced

Taunton Deane's draft Corporate Plan for 2017/2018.

The Corporate Plan flowed from the Council's four year strategy which covered the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2020. The 2017/2018 Corporate Plan would be the second year of this strategy.

The Plan described the actions which would be taken during the year to ensure the Council's strategic objectives were achieved for the people and place of Taunton Deane and set out how progress would be monitored and measured.

The Corporate Plan did not cover everything that the Council did, but it focussed on a combination of those issues that mattered most to local people and the unique challenges which were likely to arise from Taunton Deane's changing social, economic and environmental contexts.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that the Taunton Deane Borough Council Corporate Plan for 2017/2018 be adopted.

(b) Financial Monitoring – Outturn 2016/2017

The Council's financial performance for the 2016/2017 financial year was considered by the Executive at its meeting on 3 August 2017.

The revenue outturn position for the financial year 2016/2017 was as follows:-

- The General Fund (GF) Revenue Outturn position for 2016/2017 was a net underspend of £101,000 (0.7%). The underspend had decreased since the end of quarter 2 due to significant variances in Rent Allowances and Rebates; Cemeteries and Crematorium; Council Tax Collection; Leisure Procurement; and Interest Costs and Income.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was a 'Self-Financing' account for the Council's Housing Landlord function, which was budgeted to 'break even'. The HRA Outturn for 2016/2017 was a net underspend of £882,000 (3.3% of gross income).

The year-end financial statements reported that Deane DLO had made an overall deficit of £44,000 after contributing £101,000 to the GF. This deficit has been transferred from the DLO Trading Account Reserves which, together with a £200,000 contribution to Transformation, has decreased the reserve balance to £121,000.

The Deane Helpline had reported a net deficit of £64,000 for the year, which was an underspend of £53,000 against the final budget and represented the net cost of the service to the GF.

With regard to the budget for the Unparished Area of Taunton, although £59,786 had been allocated to a variety of schemes during the 2016/2017 financial year, £43,204 was available for allocation during the current year.

The capital outturn position for 2016/2017 is as follows:-

- The General Fund profiled Capital Programme at the end of 2016/2017 was £25,832,000. The actual expenditure on the Capital Programme during 2016/2017 was £10,256,000, with £15,527,000 being carried forward to support delivery of approved schemes in 2017/2018. This would leave a net underspend of £49,000 (0.1%) against the overall programme.
- The HRA approved Capital Programme at the end of 2016/2017 was £20,129,000. This related to schemes which would be completed over the next five years. The actual expenditure on the Capital Programme during 2016/2017 was £11,762,000, with £9,399,000 for planned investment to implement approved schemes in future years. A net overspend of £32,000 (1%) was reported against the overall programme.

The GF Reserves balance as at 31 March 2017 stood at £2,186,000. The balance remained above the minimum reserves expectation within the Council's Budget Strategy (£1,600,000).

The HRA Reserves balance as at 31 March 2017 stood at £3,224,000, which was above the minimum level (£1,800,000) set within the Council's Budget Strategy and the HRA Business Plan.

The total GF Earmarked Reserves balance as at 31 March 2017 was £17,344,000, and for HRA Earmarked Reserves the balance was £6,847,000, representing funds that had been set aside for specific purposes to be spent in 2017/2018 or later years.

The Outturn Report had previously been considered and supported by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Council's financial performance and end of year position for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account, including pre-approved carry forwards and transfers to earmarked reserves be noted;
- (2) The reported General Fund Revenue Budget underspend of £101,000 in 2016/2017 and the General Reserves Balance of £2,186,000 as at 31 March 2017 be noted;
- (3) The General Fund Revenue Budget Carry Forwards totalling £302,000 be approved;
- (4) A General Fund Capital Programme Budget Carry Forward totalling £15,527,000 be approved;
- (5) A Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme Budget Carry

Forward totalling £9,399,000 be approved; and

- (6) £590,000 of Supplementary Budget allocations in 2017/2018 for the Housing Revenue Account, utilising 2016/2017 underspends, for the following areas be also approved:-
- (i) £250,000 to provide additional technical development capacity to the in-house team for development appraisal work on complex sites;
 - (ii) £25,000 to replace the Halcon One Team Co-ordinator post until 31 March 2018;
 - (iii) £55,000 for additional officer capacity to address anti-social behaviour for a period of 18 months due to additional pressures on the team;
 - (iv) £70,000 to fast-track replacement of Piper lifelines in Sheltered Housing where these are reaching the end of their operational life;
 - (v) £40,000 to both revamp and upgrade Ladymead Road, Taunton shops for remarketing as commercial premises or to make a change of use and convert to a One Team Community Hub; and
 - (vi) £150,000 to pilot a Fabric First approach to appraise options to address thermal performance and water ingress issues in some property types.

(c) Supplementary Budget Request – Cemeteries and Crematorium

At its last meeting, the Executive considered a request for a Supplementary Budget to enable a number of areas within the Cemeteries and Crematorium service which required investment beyond that achievable in the existing Revenue Maintenance budget.

This would enhance the services offered to the public and extend the life of some assets through the creation of new plots and new income opportunities.

With the exception of the Children and Baby Memorial Gardens where the cost would be recovered but without surplus, the following projects had the ability to deliver income greater than the initial cost:-

(1) Wellington Cemetery Grave Spaces

Currently there were only four new grave spaces remaining in Wellington Cemetery. Once these had been sold the site would no longer generate income but would still need to be maintained to the current standard.

With an investment of £23,000 the hard standing located at the centre of the cemetery could be removed to free up land for up to 100 new burial spaces. This work will ensure that Wellington would have a capacity for full burial for the next eight to ten years and would allow a continuation of service whilst further options for future burial land were identified.

(2) St Mary's Cemetery – New Grave Spaces

£26,000 invested in this site would allow for much of the main drive to be removed and re-laid to create 120 full new grave spaces.

By carrying out these works it would mean a further choice to the bereaved for grave locations and would allow the provision of traditional type memorials on the plot to be re-introduced.

At the current rate of burials, 120 graves would extend the life of this service for approximately 20 years.

(3) Cremation Memorial Walkway and Cremation Plots

The Council's post cremation memorials and plots were limited in choice and older in fashion. Releasing an area that had never previously been looked at and memorialising closer to the car park in a prime location would generate further interest and retain more cremated remains on site.

Setting out the area in a formal garden arrangement using set, installed memorials at a cost of £24,000 would create a tranquil and modern reverent area for remembrance.

(4) New Children and Babies Garden at the Crematorium

The present baby garden was adjacent to the workers' yard. There was little choice to memorialise or remember the deceased who were laid to rest there. Many other crematoria had formalised, dedicated gardens for this specialist area that were very popular and gave great comfort to the bereaved.

The current area at the Taunton Deane Crematorium would benefit from investment estimated at £15,000. It was intended that the service would work with local child bereavement charities to ensure that they had input into the design and layout of the new garden.

(5) Natural Burial/Remembrance Area

An area of Taunton Crematorium had been set out to create a natural spinney/copse for interments of ashes and some full interments. Tree works and planting had taken place to provide an alternative to the formal memorial and burial sections our cemeteries offered.

The formalisation of this natural area would give relief to the high usage the current Garden of Remembrance had seen.

It was proposed to install a hardwood boardwalk at a cost of £6,000 where each board could be memorialised at a cost of £200 per tread for 10 years. This would become a working memorial and allow year round access to this site, without anyone walking through the planting.

These proposals had been considered and supported by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

On the motion of Councillor Berry, it was

Resolved that:-

- (a) A supplementary capital budget of £94,000 for the improvements to the Cemeteries and Crematorium as set out above be approved; and
- (b) The transfer of £94,000 from the Waste Earmarked Reserve to add to the Revenue Contribution to Capital (“RCCO”) budget to provide the funding for the Capital Supplementary Estimate be also approved.

(d) Proposed Business Rates Revaluation Relief

The Executive had recently considered a report concerning a proposal to amend the Council’s Discretionary Rate Relief Policy to include a new Relief for Revaluation from 1 April 2017.

A range of Mandatory and Discretionary Rate Reliefs could often reduce the amount of Non-Domestic Rates (commonly known as Business Rates) a business or organisation had to pay. The qualifying rules and levels of relief for Mandatory Reliefs were set by the Government and were the same throughout the country.

However, the rules and levels of award for Discretionary Rate Reliefs were set by each Council. A full review and updating of this Council’s policy had been undertaken in 2015 with the policy coming into effect from 1 April 2016.

The Local Government Finance Bill 2012 had introduced the Business Rates Retention Scheme which was designed to help achieve two of Government’s key priorities - Economic Growth and Localism. The scheme enabled the retention of a proportion of the Business Rates revenue generated in a local area by the relevant local authorities.

Although 50% of Business Rates collected was paid to Central Government the remaining 50% was retained locally (40% District, 9% County, 1% Fire authorities).

With regard to the former arrangements, the Government had met the cost of Mandatory Relief in full on the basis that local authorities had no choice but to award it under set criteria. However, the costs of Discretionary Relief had been met in full or in part, by local authorities as awards had been decided upon based on the Council’s own criteria.

Under the new rules Taunton Deane had to contribute 40% towards the cost of most relief - even those that it has no choice about awarding. Therefore it was important to recognise the financial risk of applying reliefs when considering any changes to the current policy.

A Business Rates Revaluation normally took place every five years. However, following a two year delay the Government had issued the new Rating List with effect from 1 April 2017.

Each Rating List had a Transitional Relief Scheme which was designed to phase

in both the increases and decreases in the amount of Business Rates payable following revaluation. This phasing could last for between one and five years depending on the level of increase or decrease in rateable values.

However Transitional Relief did not provide support for changes in Business Rate Reliefs. Despite the increase in the threshold for eligibility to Small Business Rate Relief, some ratepayers would no longer be eligible to receive it due to an increase in their Rateable Value. This situation might also apply to current recipients of Rural Rate Relief.

The Chancellor had announced in the Spring Budget a number of measures to provide support to these ratepayers, along with support for public houses and businesses facing the largest increases.

Alongside the new Rating List, the Government had announced the establishment of a £300,000,000 Discretionary Fund over four years from 2017/2018 to support those businesses facing the steepest increases in their Business Rates bills.

The Department of Communities and Local Government had published a consultation on the design of the Discretionary Relief earlier in the year, seeking views on the allocation of the fund, arrangements for compensation for local authorities, and the operation of local schemes. Taunton Deane's proposed share was as follows:-

- 2017/2018 - £276,000;
- 2018/2019 - £134,000;
- 2019/2020 - £55,000; and
- 2020/2021 - £8,000.

Following this consultation, the Council had drafted a revised Discretionary Revaluation Relief Policy that was based on the following criteria:-

- (a) Relief would only be granted where the Rateable Value was less than £200,000 as at 1 April 2017 and the gross rates increase was greater than 5%;
- (b) Reductions if awarded would be to further increase the Transitional Relief that was phasing in the increased charge. Each year this would be less and less over four years;
- (c) The scheme was designed solely to assist ratepayers who had seen a significant increase in bills due to revaluation;
- (d) Relief would only be granted for premises which were occupied;
- (e) Relief would not be awarded where Mandatory Relief had been granted;
- (f) Taxpayers would be invited to apply;
- (g) All relief awarded would be subject to 'state aid' of €200,000 (de-minimis); and
- (h) Relief would be targeted to local businesses, not national or multi-national in nature. Local businesses were, for the purpose of the scheme, those which had premises wholly in the Council's area.

The Council would consider every application for Discretionary Revaluation Relief on its merits.

There would be no statutory right of appeal against any award of Discretionary Revaluation Relief, although as with any decision by a public authority, this could be challenged by Judicial Review. Taunton Deane would however, upon request, review decisions made.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee had previously supported the revised Discretionary Revaluation Relief Policy.

On the motion of Councillor Parrish, it was

Resolved that the use of the Council's local discount powers from 1 April 2017 to award Revaluation Relief to those organisations facing significant increases in their Business Rates bills following Revaluation be supported.

11. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item as it included exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

12. Acquisition of Thales Interests, Lisieux Way, Taunton

Considered report previously circulated, concerning an opportunity that had arisen for the Council to consolidate its ownerships of the land at Lisieux Way Business Park in Taunton.

The Council proposed to take forward refurbishment plans of buildings, ensuring essential maintenance and upgrades were carried out, also undertaking an assessment of potential development and long-term investment opportunities for this strategic employment site.

The acquisition of Lisieux Way and planned refurbishment of buildings was the first stage of a more comprehensive regeneration project, aligned with the Taunton Deane Borough Council Corporate Plan (2017-2018) Key Themes and priorities within the Taunton Growth Prospectus - Delivering the economic vision for our County Town.

There were substantial strategic benefits of retaining important hi-tech occupiers in Taunton. Under the Council's ownership, plans for refurbishment and upgrade of utility supplies could be coordinated to progress the relocation within the site of a specialist firm that had its own bespoke major investment plans for new premises.

Historic plans indicated some sections of the site might be able to accommodate other suitable uses. The next stage of the process would involve an option review and the commissioning of master-planning expertise, to assess potential opportunities.

Any potential options for comprehensive development on site would need to be compliant, feasible and viable. As such, future findings and recommendations would be reported back to the Executive and Full Council, as appropriate.

Resolved that:-

- (a) The acquisition of land and interests at Lisieux Way Business Park, Taunton from Thales UK be approved. The land sale, as identified in Appendix B to the report, would be subject to a conditional contract based on the draft terms, set out in Appendix G;
- (b) A supplementary estimate (to the value set out in the report) to the Capital Programme for this high priority Taunton Employment scheme be approved, in addition to the existing project budget previously approved in 2013/2014 specifically for the purpose of funding the regeneration of the land off Lisieux Way. This would cover the costs of land acquisition, essential landlord works to Building 2 and professional fees set out in a Business Case at Appendix H to the report which would be funded through capital borrowing; and
- (c) The delegation of authority to the Directors and Section 151 Officer to proceed with the proposed acquisition, completion of work programme and commissioning of next phase master-planning and feasibility studies, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Business Development, Asset Management, Arts and Culture, Tourism and Communications and the Leader of the Council be also approved, namely to:-
 - (i) Conclude and finalise the conditional contract between the Council and Thales UK, to deliver regeneration of the Lisieux Way Business Park; and
 - (ii) Appoint a Professional Team to advise on:-
 - Refurbishment and delivery of works scheduled: ensuring quality, Cost control and completion of refurbishment work to Building 2, ensuring the commercial units were developed to an agreed specification, agreed programme timescales and budget; and
 - The master-planning and feasibility study : An assessment of future development options for the whole site. Procurement of specialist advisors to support the Council.

(Following the above item, the public were re-admitted to the meeting.)

13. Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors

- (i) **Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)**

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- Taunton Garden Town;
- Visit to Taunton by John Glen MP, Minister for Tourism and Heritage;
- Transformation;
- Hinkley Housing Zone including Taunton Garden Town – Bid to the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund;
- Merchant Navy Day – 1 September 2017;
- Council Meetings;
- Celebrating Pip's Park;
- Broadband Upgrade;
- Visit to Conquest Centre;
- Nexus 25 – Draft Local Development Order; and
- A358 Upgrade – Current Position.

(ii) Planning Policy and Transportation (Councillor Habgood)

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

- Planning Policy;
- Garden Town Strategy and Plan;
- Junction 25 – Local Development Order;
- Mid Devon Local Plan;
- Neighbourhood Plans;
- Major Planning – Staplegrove, Comeytrove/Trull Garden Community, Firepool, Housing Objectively Assessed Need; Planning Appeal;
- Variable Message Signage; and
- A358 Upgrade.

(iii) 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 – Leisure Procurement; and
- GLL (Taunton Deane) – Wacky Wednesdays in Wellington; Pride in Priorswood; Kids Swim for a Quid; Council Swim Project; National Play Day; and Discovery Trail.

Due to the lateness of the hour, the Mayor suggested that rather than extend the duration of the meeting, questions for the other Executive Councillors in respect of their reports (details follow) could be dealt with via e-mail. This was agreed.

(iv) Corporate Resources (Councillor Parrish)

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

- Corporate Services – Transformation Programme Technology; Telephony Rollout (Smart Phones and 8x8); ICT Priorities and Resourcing; Facilities Management; and Customer Contact Service- Taunton Deane;
- Electoral Services;
- Revenues and Benefits;
- HR and Organisational Development – Payroll and HR System; Building Services and Open Spaces; Accommodation Move; Trade Union Act 2016; and Transformation;
- The Mayoralty and Democratic Services;
- Procurement Team;
- Finance – Medium Term Financial Plan/Budget; Fees and Charges; New Finance and Payroll System; and Projects.

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

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

- Somerset West Lottery Update;
- Somerset One Team Co-ordinator;
- Halcon One Team Co-ordinator;
- Legal Highs Education Programme;
- Bath Spa Evaluation of Taunton Deane One Teams; and
- Community Activities over the Summer.

(vi) **Housing Services (Councillor Beale)**

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

- Deane Housing Development – Woolaways; Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington; 12 Moorland Close, Taunton; Laxton Road, Taunton and Oake;
- Welfare Reform – Discretionary Housing Payment and Universal Credit;
- Deane Helpline;
- Review of the Somerset Strategic Housing Framework;
- Wyndham Road, Wiveliscombe; and
- And Finally.....Thanks to Officers.

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

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

- Environmental Health – Food Safety; Health and Safety; Environmental Protection; Private Water Supplies; and Safety Advisory Group – Events;
- Licensing – Performance; Appeal against decision; Complaint against decision; Cap on Taxi Numbers; and TAUNTON Town Centre Licence;
- Street Sweeping and Toilet Cleaning;
- Somerset Waste Partnership – Replacement of the Managing Director; Landfill Fires; and Driver Shortages; and
- Cemeteries and Crematorium.

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

The report from Councillor Edwards covered:-

- Business Development - Digital Taunton; Events to Support Small Businesses; Connecting Devon and Somerset; Visit by the Tourism and Heritage Minister; Taunton Deane Economic Review; Taunton Deane Business Directory; Impact of BREXIT on the Agricultural and Construction Sectors;
- Events, Place, Retail Marketing and Visitor Centre – Events Marketing, Place and Retail Marketing; and Visitor Centre;
- Strategic Regeneration Projects – Coal Orchard Redevelopment; and Lisieux Way Site, Taunton;
- Asset Management – Cheddon Road, Taunton; and New Taunton Deane Borough Council Asset Strategy.

(Councillors Coombes, D Durdan, Gaines, Govier, Morrell, Stone and Ms Webber all left the meeting at 8.50 p.m.)

(The meeting ended at 9.28 p.m.)