

## **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 20 March 2019 at 6.30 p.m.

Present      The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Herbert)  
                 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Smith)  
                 Councillors M Adkins, Berry, Mrs Blatchford, Booth, Brown, Cavill, Coombes, Cossey, D Durdan, Ms Durdan, Edwards, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gaines, Govier, Mrs Gunner, Habgood, Hall, C Hill, Mrs Hill, Horsley, James, R Lees, Ms Lisgo, Mansell, Martin-Scott, Morrell, Nicholls, Parrish, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Reed, Ryan, Mrs Smith-Roberts, Mrs Stock-Williams, Sully, Townsend, Watson, Ms Webber, Wedderkopp and Williams

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

### **1. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meetings of Full Council held on 11 October 2018 and Special Full Council held on 22 January 2019, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

### **2. Apologies**

Councillors Mrs J Adkins, Aldridge, Beale, Bowrah, Coles, Henley, Mrs Lees, Mrs Warmington and Wren.

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

Councillors Govier and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Brown, Cavill, Coombes, Gaines, Govier, James, Mansell, Nicholls, Mrs Reed, Mrs Stock-Williams, Townsend, Watson and Ms Webber all declared personal interests as Members of Town or Parish Councils.

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

- (a) Roger House referred to the recent High Street Grant Workshop where it was made known that Taunton Deane had consulted a bus company as to the issue but not a private coach operator.

Touring coaches operated very differently to buses. For example they could not use bus gates or bus lanes at the park and ride sites. He therefore asked the Council to invite Berry's Coaches to be a consultee for the whole coach industry as they had national experience of coach tours, working in urban areas and planned changes in environmental standards.

In his view, Berry's would be an asset as far as the grant bid was concerned as they could show how more visitors to the town centre by coach could be attracted.

Councillor Mark Edwards thanked Mr House for his question and felt it would be a good idea to include the views of a private coach operator in the High Street Grant bid.

(b) Alan Debenham asked the following questions:-

- (i) At the Special Meeting of Full Council last August, he had asked a question about the proposed name of the new Council which he and numerous other local residents did not support.

His question had been answered in very positive manner with the promise that, as soon as the new Council had its first meeting then its name could, and would, be changed to "Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council" giving priority to our County Town of Taunton. Did this promise still hold...as it appeared that the Council was going ahead with the use of the Somerset West and Taunton name? When could this ridiculous new name be changed to something that Taunton Deane residents would more wholeheartedly support?

- (ii) In the past week many residents would have received their Council Tax bill and been angered again by the bill increasing by almost 5%, way above current inflation standing at 2%. This not only made it difficult for less well-off people to pay the tax, or to understand why the Government continued to reduce its support grant to local Councils.

With the mantras of 'freezing Council Tax' or giving people 'more for less' via efficiency savings disappearing in the past couple of years, why was there no longer the added document with the tax bill which analysed and fully explained the reasons for changes to the Council Tax?

- (iii) With the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review in mind, what was the Council pressing the Government for in funding terms to replace the Revenue Support Grant and, to what extent were real governing powers for local Councils being sought to make them financially independent of Westminster, via new local tax-raising powers as proposed many years ago by the Layfield Royal Commission?

Councillor John Williams thanked Alan Debenham for advance notice of his questions. He replied as follows:-

- (i) The name of the new Council had been approved by the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government and this would come into effect on 1 April 2019.

As far as changing the name was concerned, once the new Council was formally elected in May, it could seek a change to the name if it was the wish of the majority of Members.

- (ii) The Regulations relating to providing information to local residents explaining changes to their Council Tax bills had changed a few years ago. Instead of printing an insert for inclusion with the bills, the Council had chosen to provide the necessary information of the major

preceptors on its website. Residents were able to request a printed version of this information but since introduction only three requests for this had been received.

- (iii) The Council fully participated in the Comprehensive Spending Review and responded to all consultations regarding future funding. The Local Government Association also worked tirelessly for Councils to ensure the Government fully understood the financial difficulties Local Government faced.

Taunton Deane had lost 65% of its Revenue Support Grant from the Government over the past six years. Despite this, a balanced budget for the new Council had been approved for 2019/2020 and, as things stood, it was predicted that there would be a balanced budget over the next five years. Councillor Williams was of the view that the Council continued to provide a good standard of services to the local community.

- (c) In her absence due to illness, the Temporary Democratic Services Specialist read out the following question from Mrs Bev Fernandes addressed to Councillor Richard Parrish relating to the Taunton Garden Plan Vision.

“The vision appeared to have “green” running throughout it - the need for green space, areas for children to play and green corridors.

However, did the vision mean that the Council would allow building and development on parks and open spaces, such as the one currently proposed on Galmington Playing Field? This land had been left in trust for the people of Taunton to use for recreation and sports, and not to be built upon.

She was concerned that due to the lack of public consultation around this proposal could mean that other projects might not come to public knowledge either. This would seem to defy the statement “As we moved forward, further engagement and strong participation with individual citizens, local communities and representatives from key sectors of society within Taunton would be vital”.

I would welcome Councillor Parrish’s response”.

In response, Councillor Parrish stated that he had had no prior notice of Mrs Fernandes’s question but promised that a full response would be sent to her in due course.

He did comment that the proposed development would require only 5% of the total area of Galmington Playing Field. To suggest that further development would take place on other parks and green open spaces was not the case. He added that anyone was able to make an application for planning permission regardless as to whether they owned the land concerned.

## **5. The Bishop Fox’s Educational Foundation**

Councillor Stephen Martin-Scott drew the attention of Councillors to the

Bishop Fox's Educational Foundation.

The Foundation, upon which he served as one of the trustees, was a local educational charity with assets of over £4,000,000. The interest generated on these assets was available which could be used to help fund local 11-24 year olds in activities that would help them reach their educational aspirations.

He had circulated to all Councillors details of the Foundation and the type of Project that could qualify for funding, ranging from capital schemes to uniform grants, and how and when applications should be submitted.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Martin-Scott for his contribution and congratulated him on raising the profile of the Foundation.

## **6. Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors**

### **(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor John Williams)**

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- New Council and Re-organisation;
- Proposed Dualling of the A358 – Update on Progress;
- Works to Junction 25 of the M5 Motorway and progress report on Nexus 25;
- The Deane House – Refurbishment Complete; and
- Country Park off Maidenbrook Lane, Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton Parishes.

### **(ii) Planning Policy and Transportation (Councillor Richard Parrish)**

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

- Car Parks - Pay on Foot;
- Public Space Improvement Project;
- Planning Appeal – Gladman Developments – Land at Creech St. Michael;
- Cornhill, Wellington; and
- Taunton Garden Town Vision.

### **(ii) Sports, Parks and Leisure (Councillor Mrs Vivienne Stock-Williams)**

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

- Community Leisure – Play and Recreation; Play Equipment Repairs; Section 106 Funding for Play, Sport, Allotments and Community Halls; Capital Grant Scheme for Voluntary Village Halls, Sports Clubs and Allotments and the Parish Play Area Grant Scheme; Friends of Netherclay (Bishops Hull); Carols around the Bandstand, Vivary Park, Taunton; and Staffing;

- GLL (Taunton Deane) – Community Sport and Health;
- Leisure Procurement Project;
- Parks and Open Spaces – Arboriculture; Comeytrove Park; Green Flags; Frieze Hill Community Orchard; Somerset Memorial Wood; Staffing; Transition Town Wellington; Vivary Park; Unauthorised Encampment Action, Wellington Flower Tower; Wellington Park;
- Property – Station Road Swimming Pool; and Wellington Sports Centre.

(iv) **Corporate Resources (Councillor Andrew Sully)**

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

- Corporate Performance;
- Customer Services;
- ICT/Technology;
- Members Case Management;
- Human Resources;
- Finance;
- Revenues and Benefits; and
- 'Democratic Services' and the Mayoralty.

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

In Councillor Mrs Warmington absence, Councillor Williams presented the Community Leadership report which reflected on some of what had been achieved over the last four years.

What stood out in particular was that much of what the Council had done in the community was increasingly achieved through working together in partnerships with others. Working in partnership was leading to long term efficiencies, simpler internal arrangements, aligned strategies, a focus on what we all wanted to achieve, some shared budgets and much better outcomes.

At the end of the discussion on this report, Councillor Williams paid tribute to Richard Bryant, the former Democratic Services Manager, who was due to retire in mid-May following almost 36 years' service with Taunton Deane.

On behalf of the Council he offered his greatest thanks to Mr Bryant and wished him well for the future.

(vi) **Housing Services (Councillor Stephen Martin-Scott)**

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

- A Memorable Year - Target of delivering 200 affordable homes

for Taunton Deane exceeded; Completion of Parmin Close, Taunton; the continued success of the Council's own new build development programme; completion of the 12 Moorland Close, Taunton development; and the conclusion of the 12 month resident consultation in North Taunton;

- Other Affordable Housing Developments - Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington; North Taunton Woolaway; Oake; and Laxton Road, Taunton;
- Somerset Housing Strategy; and
- North Taunton Woolaway Project.

A verbal report on the topic of Homelessness in Somerset and Taunton Deane was provided at the meeting by Councillor Martin-Scott.

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

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

- Street Sweeping and Toilet Cleaning;
- Somerset Waste Partnership;
- Cemeteries and Crematorium;
- Licensing; and
- Environmental Health.

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

The report from Councillor Edwards covered:-

- Communications;
- Events, Place, Retail Marketing and Visitor Centre – Events; Place and Retail Marketing; and Visitor Centre;
- Growth Strategy and Specific Projects – Coal Orchard Redevelopment, Taunton; Geospatial and Innovation Centre; The Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton; and High Street Fund Bid for Taunton; and
- Asset Management Service Update – Leisure Procurement Facilities – Assets and Leases; Accommodation Project; Blackdown Business Park; Cornhill Development; Annual Asset and Insurance Valuations; and Asset Management System (Open Assets by Capita); and
- Tackling Unauthorised Encampments.

## **7. Taunton Deane Borough Council Milestones**

Councillor Norman Cavill reflected on some of the significant events which had occurred during the 45 years Taunton Deane Borough Council had been

in existence.

These included the granting of the Royal Charter which afforded the status of 'Borough Council' on Taunton Deane; The Deane House being constructed to bring together the different arms of the Council for the first time; the opening of significant buildings such as the Station Road and Blackbrook Swimming Pools, Blackbrook and Wellsprings Leisure Centres; the major enhancement scheme in Taunton Town Centre; the award of the Freedom of the Borough to Councillors John Meikle MBE and Clifford Bishop, the Somerset Light Infantry (now 'The Rifles') and 40 Commando Royal Marines; and the decisions taken by both Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils to seek dissolution of both Councils to enable a new Council to be called Somerset and West Council to be formed to come into operation on 1 April 2019.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

Following the completion of agenda item No. 9, the Deputy Mayor (Councillor Fran Smith) took the Chair.

**8. Councillor Catherine Avril Herbert**

On the motion of Councillor Richard Parrish, seconded by Councillor Roger Habgood, it was **resolved** that the best thanks of the Council be accorded to Councillor Catherine Avril Herbert for the manner in which she had discharged the duties of the Office of Mayor during her term of office.

The Mayor replied.

(Note: Councillor Mrs Herbert's term would formally end on 31 March 2019 as the new Somerset West and Taunton Council would come into operation on 1 April 2019. The meeting was therefore the last opportunity the Council had to offer it's thanks to the Mayor. After 1 April, the Mayor would continue to honour invitations to events and engagements on an 'informal' basis up to and including 2 May 2019 when the Local Government Elections would be held.)

**9. Past Mayor's Badge**

The Deputy Mayor presented Councillor Mrs Herbert with her past Mayor's badge.

On completion of agenda item No. 11, the Mayor resumed the Chair and closed Taunton Deane Borough Council's final Full Council meeting at 9.15 p.m.

(Councillors Mrs Reed, Booth, Horsley and Farbahi left the meeting at 8.01 p.m. 8.40 p.m. 8.42 p.m. and 9.10 p.m. respectively.)