

A TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL FOR TAUNTON? HAVE YOUR SAY

Somerset West and Taunton Council is carrying out a review to decide on whether changes should be made to the existing local governance arrangements, including whether or not a new town/parish council(s) should be set up to represent Taunton and if so, whether the new council(s) should cover just those parts of Taunton that don't currently have a parish council ('the Unparished Area') or also take in parts of the surrounding parish areas; and whether any other changes should be made to those parishes.

All local residents and organisations are invited to give their views.

What is a Community Governance Review?

A Community Governance Review is a formal process involving consultation with local electors and other interested parties on potential changes such as creating new parishes, setting up or abolishing town/parish councils, changing their boundaries or electoral arrangements.

What are town and parish councils?

Town and parish councils exist in many areas, both rural and urban, and are the most local tier of government in England. Somerset West and Taunton Council as a 'principal council' is responsible for deciding whether to create, amend or abolish parish areas within its boundaries and whether to establish a council to serve any parish.

A parish council that serves a town area may decide to call itself a 'town council'.

Town and parish councils do not have statutory responsibility for services such as social care, education or housing but they may decide to provide some local services for their residents or in some cases to take over responsibility for services previously delivered by Somerset West and Taunton Council or Somerset County Council.

Town and parish councils also represent their communities. These local councils can also play a key role in communities by the promotion of community engagement

between the council and residents and more inclusive local government. They must be consulted on planning applications within their area and may work with the principal council to create a Neighbourhood Plan for development in their area. They may bid to purchase assets of community value or express an interest in running a local authority service.

Town and parish councils are directly elected by local voters and are independent of the other layers of local government. Any new town or parish council, for example in Taunton, would not replace Somerset West and Taunton Council or the new Unitary Authority but would exist alongside.

Why is Somerset West and Taunton Council carrying out the review at this time?

Taunton is the only area in Somerset that does not have a Town or Parish Council level of local government. The Council is undertaking the review as it is a key corporate priority for the 21/22 municipal year. Somerset West and Taunton Council took the decision that a Community Governance Review should be undertaken at this time because the former Taunton Deane Borough Council committed to address this anomaly in 2018, and the new Council restated this commitment in March 2021, with a view to any new council coming into being from 1 April 2023 so that it could play a full and proper role, alongside the town and parish councils representing other areas, in negotiations with the proposed new unitary authority for Somerset.

Across the country, many areas that were previously unparished have been turned into town and parish councils in previous years. Town or parish councils may also promote community engagement and effective local government. In addition, Government guidance is that a Community Governance Review should be carried out every 10-15 years.

What kinds of services could a town or parish council provide and how much would it cost?

There are almost 10,000 parish and town councils across England, with populations ranging from fewer than 200 to almost 100,000. The range of services provided varies accordingly and each town or parish council decides what, if any, services it will provide. Typically, these can include the provision of allotments (a statutory responsibility, if there is demand); parks and recreation grounds; public conveniences; control of litter; play areas; community centres; crime prevention; festivals and fetes; traffic calming; tourism activities and/or markets. However there are examples of different types of services being delegated to councils, for example street cleaning and CCTV in Salisbury, and a library in Charnwood.

As the level of services provided varies significantly between town or parish councils, so does the level of the precept that they charge Council Tax payers. For example, the average precept payable in 2020-21 by a Band D Council Tax payer within the Somerset West and Taunton Council area is £43.86 per annum. The national

average Band D precept of all precepting parish and town councils in the current year is £64.05 per annum. The Charter Trustees for Taunton for 21/22 precepted £52,819, from the Unparished Area of Taunton ratepayers. This was equivalent to £3.47 expenditure per Band D property. In addition to this amount, Somerset West and Taunton are able to precept a limited amount for Special Expenses on the Unparished Area of Taunton ratepayers to fund the types of activities that a Town or Parish Council would usually provide. In 2021/22 this amounted to £29,093 or £1.91 on a Band D property. These two charges would be replaced by any Town or Parish Council precept.

A town or parish council itself decides what level of precept to charge but in the case of any new town or parish councils, Somerset West and Taunton Council would set the precept for their first year of operation based on the estimated cost of the level of activity expected. In relation to service delivery and the level of precept, just as for any town or parish councils elsewhere in Somerset West and Taunton, a new Town or Parish Council could decide in future to take on additional services of the sort set out above, in negotiations with the new Unitary Council.

What area(s) could any new town or parish council(s) cover?

At the Full Council meeting on 19th October 2021, Full Council resolved to include within the scope of the review eight surrounding parishes which could be affected by any Community Governance Review. These are Trull, Bishop's Hull, Comeytrowe, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove, Kingston St. Mary, Cheddon Fitzpaine, West Monkton, with a view to the creation of a parish or parishes and council(s) to serve all or part of that area.

The government guidance does state that the division of a cohesive area, such as a Charter Trustee town, would not reflect the sense of community that needs to lie behind all parishes; or places where there were no recognisable smaller communities, and a larger parish may best suit the needs of the area.

However, alternative options are possible - for example there could be a larger number of small town or parish councils representing individual areas, parts of Taunton could remain unparished, or we could simply retain the status quo. Somerset West and Taunton Council wants to know your views.

Will the Taunton Charter Trustees remain in place?

Not necessarily. The Charter Trustees for Taunton were established in 2019 in order to be able to save the historic Mayoralty for Taunton from being abolished. They are the 16 Somerset West and Taunton councillors elected to represent wards in the unparished area of Taunton. The Trustees elect a Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Taunton each year. The Mayor and Deputy uphold the traditional roles previously carried out by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Taunton Deane within the boundary of the unparished area.

Charter Trustees only have the power to raise a precept to cover the costs of their administration and the associated costs for the upkeep of the Civic Insignia or 'Silver' and the Mayoralty of Taunton. They cannot legally precept for taking on responsibilities and costs that Parish and Town Councils can such as grass cutting and public conveniences.

Proposals to create a parish or parish council covering all or part of a charter trustee area need to be judged in particular against the following considerations:

- a) the effect on the historic cohesiveness of the area
- b) what are the other community interests in the area?
- c) Is there a demonstrable sense of community identity encompassing the charter trustee area?
- d) Are there smaller areas within it which have a demonstrable community identity and which would be viable as administrative units?

This review is an opportunity for local people to comment on any changes that they might like to suggest in respect of the existence of the Unparished Area, the Taunton Charter Trustees, the area covered by it and its electoral arrangements (the number of councillors, wards etc). In the event that following the Community Governance Review a decision is made to parish the Unparished Area, the Charter Trustees would be dissolved upon the vesting of the new Council and their assets transferred.

Issues to be considered by the review

In arriving at its recommendations the law requires that Somerset West and Taunton Council must have regard to the need for community governance arrangements to:-

- reflect the identities and interests of the community in the area;
- and
- promote effective and convenient local government.

It must also consider the impact of town or parish councils on community cohesion and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish; and must take into account any other existing or potential arrangements for community representation or engagement in the area.

In coming to decisions on the electoral arrangements for any town or parish council the Council must consider the number of electors in the area(s) under review and any change in the number or distribution of those electors which is likely to occur in the next five years.

Any town or parish council should reflect distinctive and recognisable communities of interest, with their own sense of identity and electors should be able to identify with the town or parish in which they live. Any submissions providing evidence of community identity or local linkages will be important considerations in this review.

When would any new town or parish council(s) be set up?

By law the review must be completed within 12 months of starting it. This review started in November 2021 and is planned to be completed by May 2022. It is anticipated that if any new town or parish councils were to be established following this review they would come into existence no later than April 2023.

Alternative forms of Community Representation

There are some bodies in place already in Taunton which represent local residents, such as Community groups, Resident's Associations etc. As part of the review, the Council would like to know if residents think these could be developed to promote Community representation and engagement as alternatives to, or stages towards, the establishment of town or parish council(s).

Electoral Arrangements

If a new Parish/Town Council is established, Somerset West and Taunton Council is required to decide whether it should be divided into wards for the purpose of electing parish/town councillors, taking into account (i) whether the number, or distribution, of the local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and (ii) whether it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the council.

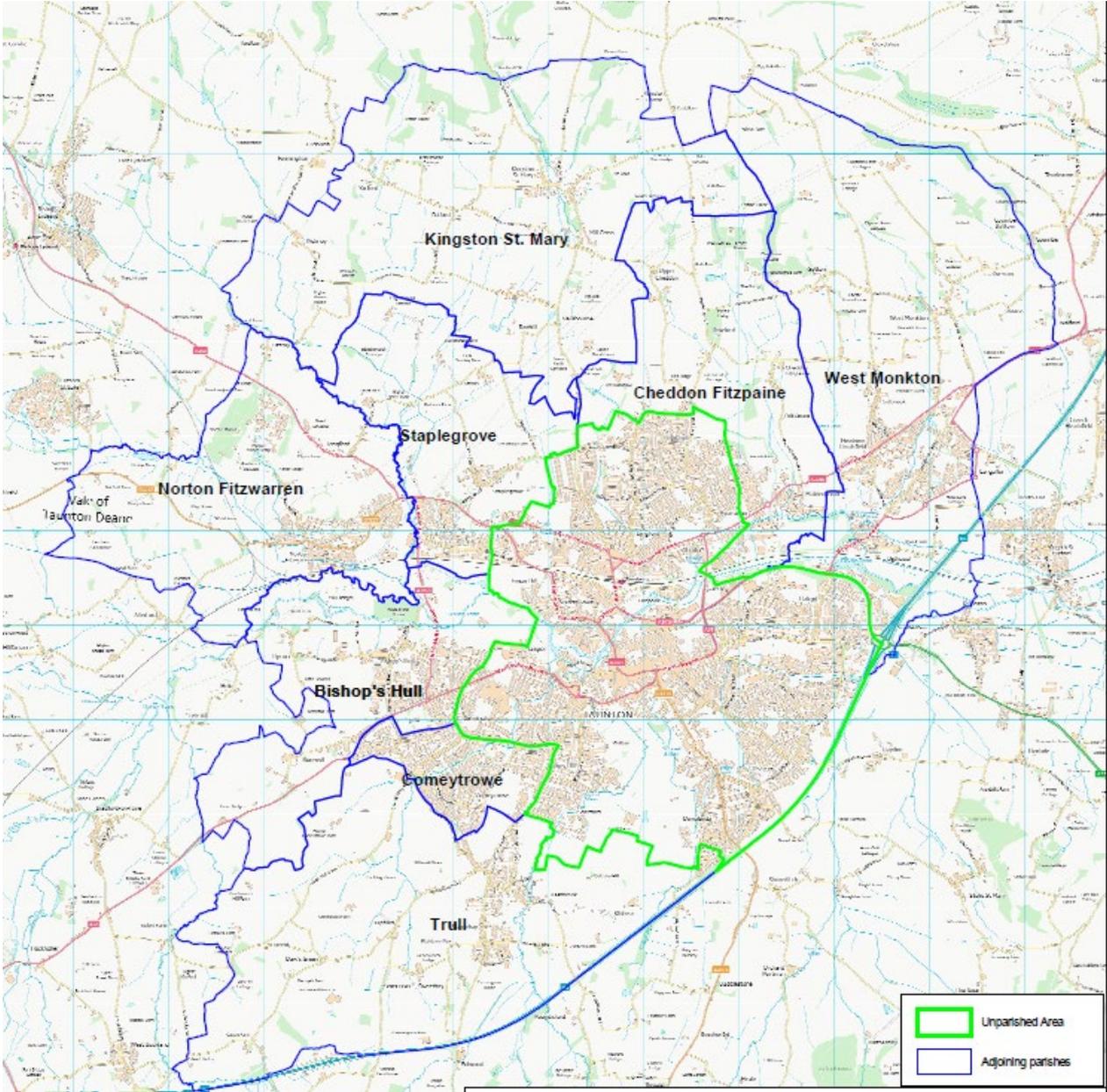
The total local electorate for the unparished area of Taunton is currently 34,536 and for the purposes of district council elections the area is divided into nine wards returning a total of 16 councillors. Somerset West and Taunton Council believes that it would not be practicable or convenient for a single election to be held for the whole of any new parish/town council for the area. Subject to this consultation it is therefore proposed that any new parish/town council should be divided into wards based on the existing district ward boundaries within the unparished area.

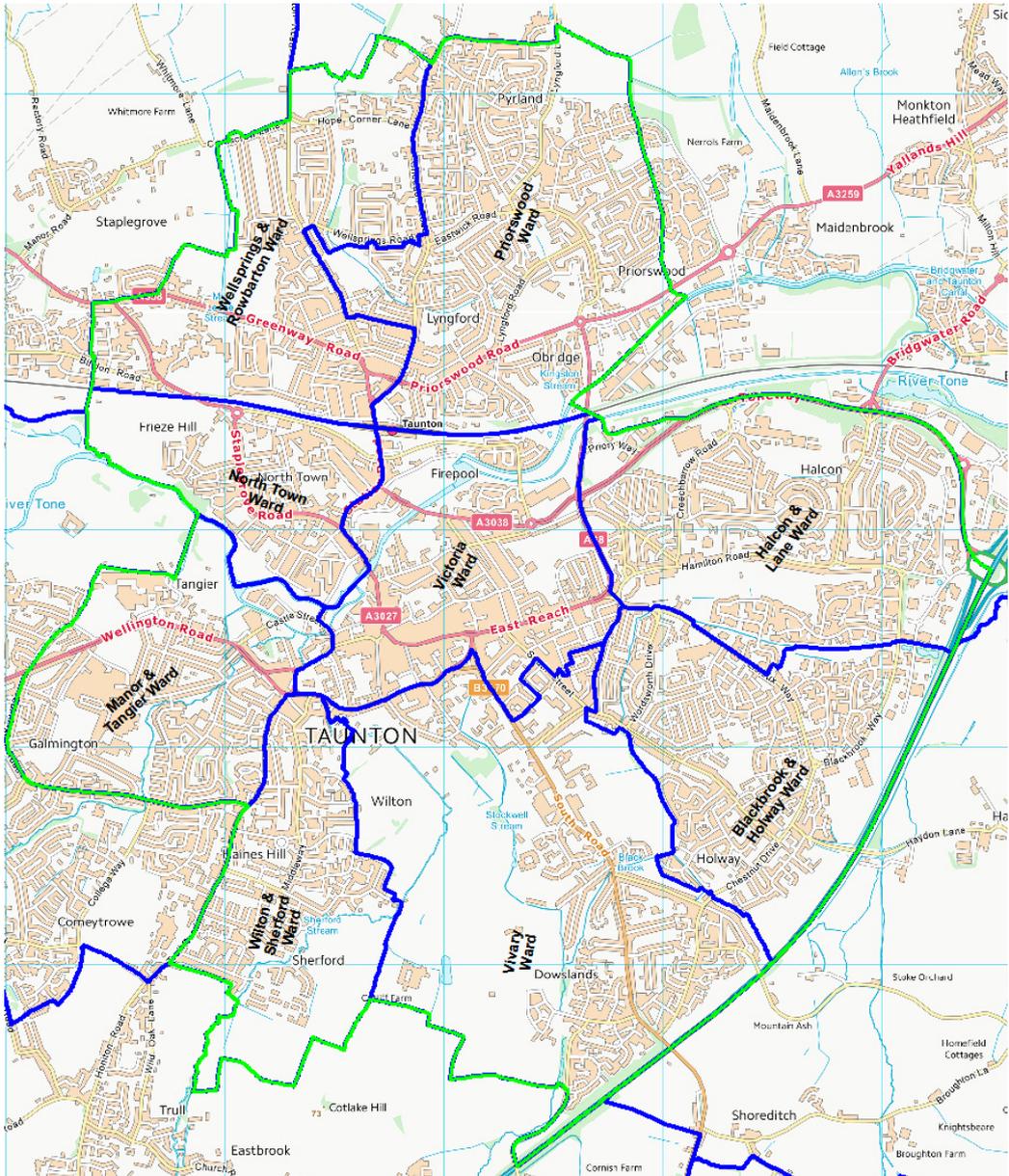
How to find out more

Full information about the Community Governance Review including the terms of reference and detailed timetable are on the website at www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Map

The two maps below shows the existing Unparished Area Boundaries together with the Somerset West and Taunton Council Wards (revised with effect from May 2019) and the eight surrounding parishes included in the scope of the review area.





WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS

Please tell us what you think about the matters above or any other issues concerning governance at the town or parish council level by **Wednesday 12th January 2022**. Somerset West and Taunton Council will consider all submissions received before coming to its draft recommendations, which will then be published for further consultation before any final decisions are made.

Community Governance Review - Questionnaire

A TOWN/PARISH COUNCIL FOR TAUNTON?

INTRODUCTORY PAGE

Somerset West and Taunton Council is carrying out a review to decide on changes to existing local governance arrangements, including whether or not a new town or parish council or councils should be set up in those parts of Taunton where they don't currently exist.

Full information about the review including the terms of reference and a timetable, are on our website at www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

All local residents, business owners and organisations within the area of the scope of the review are invited to give their views.

The Council will consider all feedback before making draft recommendations. These will then be subject to further consultation before final recommendations are published and considered by Councillors.

You can complete this questionnaire online, or obtain a paper version and return it to Governance Team, Somerset West and Taunton Council, PO Box 866, Taunton, TA1 9GS or hand it in one of our offices.

Alternatively you can tell us your views by e-mailing:
governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

This consultation will close on **Wednesday 12 January 2022**

1. Please tell us whether you are a:

- Local resident
- Local employee
- Local business person
- Official representative of community organisation – Please state which one.....
- Other (please state)

2. Please enter the postcode of your home (if a local resident) or work/other premises with which you have a local connection

.....

3. Based on where you live (or work/other connection with the area under review), which town, parish, area or locality do you feel you belong to?

RESPONSE (free text)

4. Should a town or parish council or councils be set up to serve the parts of Taunton that do not currently have them (the 'unparished areas')?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If 'Yes' or 'Don't know' go to Q. 5

If 'No' go to Q. 7

REASONS/COMMENTS (free text)

5. Should a single town or parish council be set up to cover the whole of the currently unparished area of Taunton or should there be separate councils for any area(s) within the unparished area?

- A single council for the whole unparished area
- Separate councils for areas within the unparished area (please specify those separate areas)
.....
.....
- Don't know

6. Should any new parish or town council that is set up in the currently unparished area of Taunton also take in the urban parts of any surrounding parish(es)?

- Yes – the new parish/town council should also take in the urban part(s) of the following surrounding parish(es):

.....
.....
.....

- No – the new parish/town council(s) should be confined to the currently unparished area.
- Don't know

For those who answered No to Question 4 - if you do not think a town or parish council or councils should be set up to serve the currently unparished areas of Taunton – please answer Q. 7 & 8

For all others please go to Q. 9

7. Why do you think that a town or parish council or councils should not be set up to serve the currently unparished areas of Taunton?

REASONS/COMMENTS (free text)

8. Do you think there are other (non-parish) forms of community governance (e.g. community partnerships/forums, area committees, residents' and tenants' associations, neighbourhood management programmes, community associations) that have been, or could be, made to promote community representation or engagement in the area under review, either as alternatives to, or stages towards, the establishment of town or parish councils?

Yes (please specify):

.....
.....
.....

No

Don't know

9. In the event that a new parish/town council is established taking in both the currently unparished area of Taunton and the urban parts of one or more surrounding parishes, what arrangements should be made for the remaining (rural) parts of those parishes?

- If viable, they should remain as individual, smaller, parishes each with their own council
- They should also be absorbed into the new town council(s) serving Taunton
- Consideration should be given to merging or grouping them into a smaller number of areas (please specify);

.....
.....
.....

Don't know

REASONS/COMMENTS (free text)

10. Do you think town or parish council(s) should consider delivering some local services that are currently provided by Somerset West and Taunton Council and for these to be paid for by the town council precept?

- Yes (please specify what sort of services you think town or parish councils could deliver)

.....
.....
.....

- No

Reasons/Comments (free text)

11. Do you have any other comments on governance issues or boundaries at the parish/town council level?

RESPONSE (free text)

Further consultation

Once this first stage of consultation has completed the Council will consider the results and then publish draft recommendations for a further stage or second stage consultation. If you would like to be contacted about the results of the first stage of consultation and alerted to the beginning of the second stage, please leave your email details below. We will only use your information to contact you about the matters above.

Name

E-mail

Privacy Notice

Somerset West and Taunton Council will hold this information for the purpose of contacting you about the second stage of this consultation, this information will not be used for any other purpose. We will hold your personal information for no longer than five years.

If you feel any information Somerset West and Taunton Council holds about you is incorrect, or if you wish to see a copy of the information we hold about you, please contact governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk