

Taunton Charter Trustees - 14 December 2021

Present: Councillor Sue Lees (Chair)

Councillors Brenda Weston, Lee Baker, Simon Coles, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Libby Lisgo, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Hazel Prior-Sankey and Federica Smith-Roberts

Officers: Jo Comer, Marcus Prouse and Charles Groom

Also Present: Councillor Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

28. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Richard Lees, Marcia Hill and Francesca Smith.

29. Minutes of the previous meetings of the Taunton Charter Trustees

(Minutes of the meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 29th June and 20th July were circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 29th June and 20th July be confirmed as a correct record.

30. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr L Baker	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke

31. **Public Participation**

Mr Roger House, Taunton Resident, was in attendance and posed the following question;

Electoral arrangements page 5 and question 11 and the number 25

We have listed 16 existing Councillors for the Shadow Councillor Group to set up new Third Tier Councils. This does not sound many compared to the number of electors and 70 odd parish councillors that serve them in the eight surrounding parishes. I assume we have to follow the important Unitary Council boundary review process, before being able to pinpoint what Council size the Boundary Commission will permit for Taunton third tier Councils. The Boundary Commission's advice on electoral arrangements is related to existing council sizes, for parishes over 20,000 electors: they report parish or town councils vary from 13 to 31 members.

County Towns, Dorchester and Truro around 20,000 electors, have 20 and 21 members respectively. Salisbury City Council population 40,000 formed in 2008 have 24 Council members.

Also the newest formed (2019) South West Town Council, Weymouth; it has 48,000 electors and 29 elected members.

16 elected members for Taunton stated in the consultation documents is clearly inadequate. Even if we start with 16 district councillors as a shadow body to set up a new Town Council then the future elected number must as a minimum be of 25. If new boundaries are not available by May 2023 elections, a 16 strong elected Council after inception should be allowed to co-opt some extra members, until a subsequent election is fought with wards for 25 Town Councillors. That would be an increase in councillors - north of the rail line 5 to 8 and south of the rail line 11 to 17. Our current electorate of 34,536 must surely rise rapidly as town centre housing proposals are built and empty offices converted to residential.

Another perception with existing town councils and warding is that where large multi-member wards can lead to one party block voting and continuing unhealthy political representation. Dorchester Town 5 wards and 18 Lib Dems of 20 Councillors, Frome town 5 wards and all Independents for Frome Councillors, then Yeovil Town all large wards returning just Lib Dem Councillors.

The latest new town council in Weymouth has been formed with smaller wards confined to two or three members to reflect more diversity and help define local communities within the town, as now described in boundary commission advice. That has meant in Weymouth there are four differing party groups plus independent councillors elected to the new body.

This modern concept of party warding is what we want here and taken with the Councillor number issue above, makes in particular the forming of a new single Town Council with one or two member wards

“Much more attractive than the option inferred by the Councils current consultation”.

A councillor workload spread, vital to help more young working people to participate.

And lastly can we ask the towns estate agents to properly name those wards based on their property for sale or let adverts. The increase in Councillors numbers is key to making this possible, for example

For the current Victoria Ward 2 seats become 3 - Priory and Trinity classic Victorian areas perhaps combined as one ward and Firepool brash new development constrained by the rail line, a single ward.

For Creechbarrow ward, easy to split in three – Lambrook, Halcon and Lane Estate. Just add 19 more traditional place names for a town council based on real communities.

Can the Charter Trustees support election warding on these principals to better promote the Taunton Town Council case to fill the unparished area?

The Mayor thanked Mr House for his question and asked Officers to provide a response. Officers thanked Mr House for his statement and question and offered a written response if required. Officers felt that if the chosen geographical area was wider than the Unparished Area it would not preclude the Council from bringing in persons representing those areas into the Shadow Town Council. The electoral arrangements would not be for the Boundary Commission but the principal council to decide on those matters.

32. **Petitions**

The Clerk advised that no petitions had been received.

33. **Motions to the Charter Trustees**

The Clerk advised that no Motions had been submitted for consideration.

34. **Communications**

The Mayor gave a brief synopsis of her activities since the summer;

- Announced the Follow Your Heart Trail and went to the subsequent auction.
- Several lunchtime concerts at St. John’s Church on Friday afternoons.
- The National Citizens Service Planning meetings at Taunton School.

- Openings such as St. Margarets Hospice Fete, Indoor Play Area at Bindon Road, new Lidl supermarket, new Shoe Store on Bridge Street, Somerset Chocolate Company at the Wetlands Centre.
- As Patron of the Taunton Deane Male Voice Choir, the Mayor attended their 75th Anniversary dinner and concert.
- Civic Events such as VJ and VE Day, Armed Forces Day, Remembrance, NHS Thank you Day and Carols around the Bandstand, which raised £740 for the Mayor's Charity.

35. **To answer questions under Standing Order 8**

The Clerk advised that no such questions had been requested to be put.

36. **Community Governance Review for Taunton - Stage 1 Consultation**

The Clerk advised that he hoped the Charter Trustees were aware of the current Stage 1 consultation underway on this matter. He and other Councillors on the Working Group had been attending various parish council meetings in the area effected. The Clerk advised the Councillors that they could decide to submit a collective response as well as a singular response.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and asked questions which included:-

- Concerns were raised about the shortness of the consultation period, especially during the Christmas period and how people could be encouraged to respond.
- *The Clerk advised that 96 people had responded so far and several emails. Parish Councils were also doing their own surveys.*
- Concerns were raised that the views of those in the parished areas would be given more prominence in the consultation due to the unparished area being disadvantaged and it was expressed that they should be treated equally.
- A query was raised around the elections in 2022 and the involvement of those Councillors elected representing those wards in the affected area.
- *The Officer would come back with a written response on this matter.*
- The continued maintenance of the Taunton Mayoralty was considered important to the people of the town.

The Charter Trustees for Taunton **RESOLVED** to respond to Somerset West and Taunton Council's Stage 1 Consultation on the Community Governance Review for Taunton as follows;

We believe that a single Town Council should be set up to cover at least the whole of the currently unparished area of Taunton.

37. **Interim External Auditor Report and Certificate 2020/21**

The Clerk introduced the report, who had been liaising with the External Auditors regarding some changes which may be required to the Governance Return and Account Statements before its finalisation, due largely to the way the Charter Trustees were funded in their first year of operation from the Special Expenses precept, and its subsequent return of unspent funds to the District Council. The Final Approved Statement of Accounts would be published on the Charter Trustees webpage when completed.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and asked questions which included:-

- Concerns were raised that the Charter Trustees were perhaps not getting the appropriate level of financial support from SWT.
- *The Charter Trustees gained a good level of support from colleagues at Finance in SWT, which isn't necessarily covered by the precept in purchasing from SWT.*

The Charter Trustees **RESOLVED** that they had considered the report and requested that the SWT s151 Officer be engaged to advise on this matter.

(The Meeting ended at 7.49 pm)