

Taunton Charter Trustees - 20 January 2022

Present: Councillor Sue Lees (Mayor)

Councillors Brenda Weston, Lee Baker, Chris Booth, Simon Coles, Caroline Ellis, Libby Lisgo and Hazel Prior-Sankey

Officers: Jo Comer and Marcus Prouse and Jackie Evans

Also Present Councillors Francesca Smith and Federica Smith-Roberts
via Zoom:

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm)

38. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Deakin, Hill, R Lees, Perry and Peters.

Cllr Smith and Smith-Roberts joined the meeting via Zoom.

39. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees - TO FOLLOW

(Minutes of the meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 14th December 2020 were not able to be circulated with the agenda)

The Clerk informed Councillors that unfortunately the minutes of the proceedings of the previous meeting were not yet ready but would be included in the Agenda pack for the next meeting along with the minutes of this meeting.

40. 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 C Booth | All Items | Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr S Coles | All Items | SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee | 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 |

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

41. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak or ask questions.

42. **Petitions**

No petitions had been submitted for the Charter Trustees consideration.

43. **Motions to the Charter Trustees**

No motions had been submitted for the Charter Trustees consideration.

44. **Communications**

The Mayor reported that all of the events in the run-up to Christmas had been very special, including the lights switch-on and Carols around the Bandstand. January was going to be quieter but the Mayor was enjoying representing the people of Taunton to the best of her ability and would continue to do so.

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

No Councillors present had requested to ask a question under Standing Order 8.

46. **Taunton Area - Local Community Networks**

The Clerk introduced the item which had been placed on the Agenda per a request made by Cllr Weston prior to Christmas. Two Officers from the Local Community Network (LCN) workstream from both Somerset County Council and Mendip District Council, Alyn Jones and Sara Skirton respectively had agreed to attend and present some slides and take any questions Councillors had on the developing project.

The Mayor invited the officers present to make their presentation. LCN's would help to set priorities for the new Council and influence how services are delivered in their areas. It is currently envisaged that 15-20 would be created as part of the proposal, but a lot of work was still needed to define the geographies, recognising

functional community boundaries. There would be no splitting of towns or parishes. Each LCN would be given a small budget to get projects over the ground and a significant influence over the overall Unitary Budget. They would also be given formal Committee status, with an elected Unitary Councillor for that area sitting on it, meeting 6-8 times a year. A lot of work would take place outside of the Committees. They were an opportunity to give local people a voice in decision making. Decisions would need to align with the Policy framework of the Unitary Council. There had been four LCN pilots set up. The LCN's will be supported by a 'data-pack' similar to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. The LCN boundaries will be brought forward for consultation during the summer. There was also ongoing work on a Charter with Town and Parish Councils in consultation with the Somerset Association of Local Councils and the Society of Local Council Clerks.

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

- The information presented was interesting but was considered generic at this stage. A question was raised as to how aware officers working on the LCN project were as to the potential creation of a Town Council for Taunton and the creation of an LCN alongside which could be particularly complicated?
- *It was recognised as an area of focus and would work closely with colleagues in Somerset West and Taunton leading on that project.*
- It was commented that as Councillors for Taunton it was felt that there was no voice for them in this process and the Charter Trustees should be included as consultees as much as Town Councillors elsewhere in Somerset.
- *Part of the attendance this evening was to raise the concept with the Trustees and no decisions had been taken, which would be for the administration of the new Council. Feedback from this meeting would be helpful in shaping the project. Conversations would continue throughout this process.*
- Further clarification was sought on the structure of the LCN's, e.g. how would a person be appointed to an LCN, their status and how would this be decided? A Committee of the Council would suggest a more formal structure.
- *This was still to be decided in appointments. In terms of engagement with different bodies there needed to be careful thought as to how the LCN's would best function to support these. The Pilots would help inform this and the evaluation that was ongoing.*
- The possible devolution of Planning matters to a local level was queried.
- *This was not in scope of the current work due to the way the Business Case was written but was open to the new Unitary administration if possible. This was something for the service alignment workstream.*
- *In other areas such as Wiltshire, LCN's had been able to augment the Unitary Council offer to provide something more bespoke.*
- The concern over the lack of ability to hold hybrid meetings legally was considered a concern in allowing everyone who wished to participate easily and accessibly.

- *LCN meetings would be considered touchpoints and the substantive work would be undertaken between.*
- Discussion was held on the interplay between the Community Governance Review for Taunton and the LCN's for the Taunton area, particularly in relation to boundaries.
- *Each voluntary organisation would need to decide whether to commit resources to the LCN and its decision-making process.*
- The One Teams in Somerset West and Taunton and Sedgmoor were considered more appropriate to deal with confidential and difficult local issues and it was hoped these would remain.
- *Individual circumstances would not be discussed at LCN's.*
- Discussion was held on the alignment of the Policy Framework and the interplay between LCN's and the Unitary Council.

The Mayor thanked the attendees for their time and looked forward to further information in the due course of time.

47. **Budget Monitoring 2021/22**

The Governance Specialist introduced the item and confirmed that a colleague from the Finance Team at SWT, Jackie Evans was in attendance via Zoom if there were any specific questions that the Specialist could answer. A further breakdown of the Civic Spend budget line (£10,000) was also included to provide further insight and transparency on the costs. There were a couple of items such as Accommodation and Vehicle usage had not been re-charged as yet by Somerset West and Taunton Council.

There was a predicted overspend this year due to the impact of the 1.75% pay award and the liability of the Charter Trustees for Value Added Tax, both impacts had not initially been factored in. The Charter Trustees did not enjoy exemption status as Somerset West and Taunton do and this had been explored as to how this could be gained but was a potentially lengthy process involving the laying of orders in Parliament, and in the light of the Community Governance Review may be overtaken by events. The VAT costs had been built into the forthcoming years budget.

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

- A query was raised as to whether monies could be moved between budget lines to support particular areas of need?
- *There was not much scope within this years budget to do so, but it was possible to do so providing the Charter Trustees kept within the overall budget total.*
- Clarification was sought on any grants budget for The Mayor and the current situation with the Twinning support monies.

RESOLVED to note the review of the in-year spend of the Taunton Charter Trustees Budget for 2021/22

48. **Taunton Charter Trustees Budget 2022/23**

The Specialist in Governance introduced this item, the third budget that the Taunton Charter Trustees would set following their creation. Following the advice of the Internal Auditors the Precept request was separate from the Budget item. The Budget provided for a range of activities that the Mayoralty covers over the year. As Members were aware, this budget would have to be justified to ratepayers and managed responsibly. There was a need for any spending to have a direct link to the civic role of the Taunton Mayoralty and the limitations in scope as Charter Trustees.

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

- It was queried as to whether the two twinning link organisations had been contacted to ensure they definitively did not require funds?
- *Recent contact had been made with both organisations and SWT now held the funds on behalf of the Lisieux Twinning Organisation.*
- Comment was made that not all those who participated in twinning were from the unparished area.
- A question was raised as to what would happen when the Charter Trustees ceased to exist at the end of March 2022 between the few weeks when there would be an election.
- *The District Council would set the budget for the new Town Council for 23/24 based on an estimation. Further work would need to be understood what would happen to the Mayoralty if there was any proposal to split the Charter Trustee area.*
- *When the Re-organisation Order is created a Shadow Town Council could be created which would support the arrangements needed to be put in place by 1st April 2023. A written answer would be sought on the technical issue raised by that gap between the 31st March and the May Election.*
- Further detail was sought on the possible exercise of a Freedom Parade, especially in a Jubilee year and the extra demands on a Mayor because of the Platinum Jubilee.
- *Officers had discussed the number of events going on in the town in 2022, some of which that Madam Mayor would only be attending, and some that she would be hosting.*

RESOLVED that the Charter Trustees for Taunton;

1. Approve the budget for the financial year 2022/2023 at the amount of £58,722, to be collected on their behalf from the Unparished Area of Taunton ratepayers by Somerset West and Taunton Council as the billing authority. This was equivalent to £3.85 expenditure per Band D property.

49. **Precept request for 2022/23**

- Discussion was had on the limitations of the precepting ability of the Charter Trustees.
- *It was confirmed that the Charter Trustees were a separate precepting body but that they did not have the competence to precept for any costs outside those directly related to the Mayoralty.*

- A query was raised as to why the Band D was used as an equivalence and further information was requested on the impact on other bands.
- *This could be provided.*

RESOLVED that the Charter Trustees for Taunton;

1. Set a precept for the financial year 2022/2023 at the amount of £58,722, to be collected on their behalf from the Unparished Area of Taunton ratepayers by Somerset West and Taunton Council as the billing authority. This was equivalent to £3.85 expenditure per Band D property.

(The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm)