

## Taunton Shadow Town Council - 31 January 2023

Present:

Councillors Tom Deakin (Chair), Brian Larcombe (Vice-Chair), Lee Baker, Chris Booth, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Robert Isaacs, John Hunt, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Derek Perry, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Ian Talbot, and Brenda Weston

Officers: Meg Stokes, Alison Blom-Cooper, Jenny Clifford, Paul Fitzgerald and Paul McClean, Marcus Prouse

Also Present: Councillors Sarah Wakefield and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

### 21. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Fothergill, Hill, Johnson, R Lees, Peters, Prior-Sankey and Keith Woodmason.

### 22. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Taunton Shadow Town Council**

**RESOLVED** to approve that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 1st December 2022 were a correct record.

### 23. **Declarations of Interest**

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

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr C Booth	All Items	SWT & Wellington & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & SWT & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Darch	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC & SWT & Taunton Charter	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Trustee		
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SCC & SWT & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & SWT & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Isaacs	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Larcombe	All Items	Comeytrowe & Lyme Regis	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	SWT & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	SWT & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	SWT & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr I Talbot	All Items	Staplegrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Wakefield	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke
Cllr B Weston	All Items	SWT & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet & SALC	Personal	Spoke

24. **Public Participation**

No requests had been made to participate.

25. **Appointment of Town Clerk - Update**

The Specialist in Governance and Democracy had emailed all Shadow Town Councillors on 16<sup>th</sup> January updating them on the successful conclusion of the Town Clerk recruitment process. This was considered a key part of the Workstream and Programme of a safe and legal Council vesting on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. A rigorous recruitment process had been undertaken with a number of

highly qualified candidates that had applied. The successful applicant, Donna Ford, had started in post this week.

The Chair of the Shadow Council echoed those prior comments on the quality of candidates and looked forward to working with the new Clerk. The Technical Advisor was thanked as well as Cllrs Larcombe and Lisgo for their time and effort in the interview selection process.

## 26. **Town Council Budget Update**

Paul Fitzgerald (s151 Officer) and Paul McClean (Finance Specialist) introduced the item and went through a slide pack, which aimed to:

- Review the budget to provide context and explanations to the items in the budget
- Review the key data used to determine the Council Tax Base (CTB) and compare the May estimate to the December actual.
- Compare the 2022/23 Parish precepts with the 2023/24 precepts, for those parishes affected by/adjacent to the new boundary.
- Review the 2022/23 forecast implementation costs to budget.
- Outline the impact of the boundary change on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) at vesting date.

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

- In relation to Parks, concern was raised around those in the urban extensions and any smaller parks that come with them and if the full impact they would have on the budget of the new town council was understood?
- *Officers had established the cost of the services that were operated by the district council and the charter trustees, what does it cost now and what do we estimate those costs to be by year one.*
- A query was raised as to whether the budget was set for general routine maintenance of the parks or was there any element for improvement in there?
- *The budget is based on the as is situation, any improvements would come out of discretionary funds.*
- Concern was raised around the salaries figure feeling very low.
- *The staffing budget was for two permanent members of staff and two part time members of staff. Maintenance would be outsourced to the Unitary council at least initially.*

- Concern was raised that there were parks left off and the risk of an additional budgetary pressure.
- *Officers had used high level estimations with Parish Councils existing budgets as building blocks. New council has obligation up to October to revise its budget, but it could not set a higher rate than that levied but there may be tweaking.*
- Members queries whether redundancy payments had been considered?
- *No provisions for redundancy were in this budget but these costs would be met if incurred.*
- Comment was made that in terms of Council Tax Band D precept was a misnomer, there were a lot of properties that were not band D. Band D equivalent is a measure, but reality is different.
- *Officers reiterated that presented this evening was the budget for 23/24, that is the take. It is the amount of money that the Town Council would receive.*
- Discussion was raised around the event employee only bringing in an income of £10,000 which was felt conservatively low. Comment was made that hopefully the Town Council could use Vivary Park for events although it will no longer own the park.
- Comment was made that it was felt unnecessary for all elected members to receive brand new IT kit.
- *Officers had erred on the side of caution for income budget for events that might be unachievable if set too high.*
- It was commended that the budget was set to be realistic but cautious. It was felt that opportunities lay ahead with other assets that may come down the line but this is based on what is being transferred.
- A query was raised in relation to the maintenance costs of different parks and why there was such a disparity and whether the General repairs person would just do works on assets that are owned by the town council and not commissioned by the unitary?
- *Officers would look to provide the further detail for the cost of the parks. The Repairs person will only be employed for the Taunton Town council assets.*
- A query was raised about whether pay awards had been factored into this budget and it was confirmed that it had not been.
- Concern was raised around the parks not on the list that were the responsibilities of the Parish. List of 11 parks, would still like to know the parks that haven't been listed. One Park in Staplegrove was not owned by the parish, it was owned by a Charity and there was a need to be able to inform the parish whether they can use it going forward.

- *If they are not on the list but owned/responsibility of SWT, they will go to the Somerset Council. We have written to the Parish Councils asking for current assets and as per the Reorg Order, anything the Parish owns or responsible for will transfer into the Taunton Town/Parish Council.*
- Comment was made that it seemed odd that the town council inherits the toilets at Vivary Park but not the park.
- Whilst members were focussing on the budget, they shouldn't lose sight of making Taunton flourish and the economic importance of the events.
- A query was raised that the Implementation budget (£80K) is currently predicting an underspend and whether this would go to the Town Council?
- *The potential spend was up to £80k but there was no intention to transfer any remainder over to Taunton Parish.*
- A query was raised at whether officers had looked at any other opportunities of generating revenue?
- *Income opportunities hadn't been looked at as of yet. These would be for the new members to determine.*
- Comment was made that Councillors had been presented with figures without knowing the ingredients. Concern was raised about inflation proofing, the Events Manager should cover their own costs (be self-funding) and the further need for assets generating an income.
- Members were informed there was Grant funding available. CIL income which the Town Council received could also be used for play park equipment etc.

**RESOLVED** that the Shadow Town Council:

- Noted the update on the Budget.

## 27. **Civic Activity/Cover for Vesting to the AGM**

The report set out a proposal to ensure the continuation of the civic activity associated with the historic Taunton Mayoralty in the period between the dissolution of the Charter Trustees for Taunton and the Annual General Meeting of the newly created Taunton Town/Parish Local Government Area, which will be required to take place within fourteen days of the elections on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023. (1<sup>st</sup> April – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023).

Members were generally in support of the report which was deemed sensible. It was requested that the support to the Mayor was provided out of the implementation budget. The progress of the work of the Coronation and Christmas lights was highlighted as needing to be commenced now.

**RESOLVED** that the Shadow Town Council noted the report.

## 28. **Judicial Review Update**

Legal Workstream Lead and Deputy County Solicitor Tom Woodhams to give an update on the Judicial Review Action. Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council had issued an application for a Judicial Review of Somerset County Council's decision to make an Order back in October. A summary grounds of defence had been submitted and the application should be thrown out at the permission stage. Since then the Council had heard from neither the Court or the applicant. It was not certain the administrative court would contact the Council before April. If the court hearings took place after April they would be far more difficult to unwind, if so ordered. The Legal Advice is that both Councils should continue the work they are doing with a legally effective Order in place.

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

- A query was raised as to whether the Judge had the power to rescind the Order, even in June/July.
- *The Judge could have the power to quash the Re-Organisation Order and therefore it will be as if it had never been made.*
- Cllr Baker and Isaacs declared, as Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Councillors, that they removed themselves from the Parish Council closed sessions whenever this matter was being discussed.

**RESOLVED** that the Shadow Town Council noted the update.

## 29. **Taunton Garden Town Briefing**

Officers presented a verbal update on this item at the meeting with slides.

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

- Queries were raised that if the Town Council looked to take on extra responsibility of maintenance and assets in these highlighted areas, what work has been done to look at the cost of this?
- *Report that the consultants had provided us with has potential follow up actions. Particularly around income generation and cost. Not there yet, work that needs to be done. Just whether there is an interest in principle.*
- It was raised that of the original Garden Town project, was there any of that money left and could this be transferred to the new town council?
- *Funds are limited and with the view that there aren't any available to the Town Council.*
- A request was made for further engagement for when a Town Council was in place. Concerned about what could be done about it at this stage.

- It was highlighted that this designation was not just about new community assets but also about existing community assets, and they did not want the needs of these assets to be forgotten.
- *This was coming from a new asset perspective.*
- Councillors welcomed the presentation and would like this door to remain open. The existing system of stewardship was felt to not work well.
- Queries were raised about whether there was a time limit or timeframe guiding this matter?
- *Officers were currently getting questions from developers on what we are proposing. No timeframe at this stage.*
- A query was raised as to how many jobs had been created since the Town was given Garden Town status in 2017?
- *A written answer would be provided.*

**RESOLVED** that the Shadow Town Council:

- Noted the update on the Taunton Garden Town and provided comments.

### 30. **Implementation Programme -Progress overview scorecard**

Officers took members through the Implementation Progress Update on Tranche 1 and 2 of the Implementation Plan. All Key milestones for Tranche 1 were met and the Town Clerk was now in post.

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

- Concern was raised that the Parish Clerks have not had the level of engagement they should have and that time was running out. Further assurance was sought clarity on the completion of all tasks by Vesting Day.
- Members requested a confidential briefing on the HR issues in play.
- A statement was made that the communications for the Elections needed to be spot on for the May elections, the first elections since the new regulations were brought in around Voter ID.

**RESOLVED** that the Shadow Town Council:

- Noted the update on the Implementation Plan progress and provided any comments.

### 31. **Taunton Shadow Town Council Forward Plan**

The Chair introduced the item and mentioned the additional items which were requested to be covered at the next meeting in terms of the steps taken to

Vesting Day/Programme Plan/ and a confidential HR Update. Members attention was drawn to the LCN Update which had been programmed for the next meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Shadow Council noted the Forward Plan.

(The Meeting ended at 8.33 pm)