

Taunton Town Council Implementation Phase

In the event that a reorganisation order is made by SCC to create a Taunton Parish/Town Council then we move into the implementation phase.

A detailed project plan has been drafted, covering all tasks that will need to be carried out in the run up to vesting day and immediately beyond vesting day. Sitting alongside this is a risk and issues log, expenditure tracker and communications plan.

An officer working group has been set up, including officers from Somerset West and Taunton Council and Somerset County Council. Depending on the decision, officers from impacted Parish Councils will also be invited to be part of the project group.

Three officers from the SWT Governance Team (including a qualified former Town Clerk) have been assigned to the Implementation project to deliver the tasks in the implementation plan, working with colleagues at SWT and SCC in specialist areas such as Finance, Asset Management, Human Resources, IT, etc.

Advice and guidance will also be sought from the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) where appropriate.

Proposed Shadow Council (Parish/Town) October 2022/31st March 2023

As set out in section 13 of the report, it is proposed that a Shadow Town Council is established in the period of October 2022 to 31 March 2023. As set out in the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) publication 'Power to the People' (2015): 'A shadow council has no statutory powers, but it can be a good means of laying the ground for the new local council'.

The role of the Shadow Town Council would be to focus the work to create the new council. It will work with the officers, external consultants, and interim town clerk (when appointed) to develop the various draft policies, procedures, infrastructure etc that will need to be in place as soon as possible after the new council is established, and to oversee the programme of work required to bring into being the new council.

Prior to 1 April 2023 the Shadow Town Council would not have delegated powers to make decisions or commit expenditure but would act as an advisory body to the officers and others working on the implementation programme. Formal decisions required to be made would be made by SWT Council, in consultation with SCC as the continuing authority.

The informal nature of a Shadow Town Council provides for flexibility in its membership. In relation to Taunton, particularly in the context of local government reorganisation and to ensure democratic representation of the whole area, it is proposed that the Shadow Town Council should be composed of the same persons proposed above for appointment as temporary parish/town council members from 1 April 2023, thus providing consistency and continuity in the development of the new council. Taking into account overlapping memberships this would give a total membership of approximately 24 shadow town councillors, which would be as follows:

- Charter Trustees for Taunton
- County Councillors for all divisions all or part of which fall within the area of the new Taunton Parish
- Two Comeytrowe Parish Councillors
- One Staplegrove Parish Councillor
- One Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Councillor

If the proposal for a Shadow Town Council is approved, it is suggested that the existing Community Governance Review Member Working Group of SWT, which was established on 30 March 2021 with a remit to make recommendations to the Full Council both at key milestones during the community governance review (CGR) and in relation to the implementation of the final review recommendations, would no longer be required and its 'implementation' remit would pass to the Shadow Town Council.

The first meeting of the Shadow Town Council will take place in October 2022 where it will consider the implementation project plan. It will then meet monthly to review progress against the plan, and to consider any relevant reports, for example drafted policies and procedures.

Appointment of a Town Clerk

The three members of the SWT Governance Team that have been allocated to the Implementation Project will focus on delivering the bulk of the project plan.

As soon as practicable after a Reorganisation Order is approved, work will be done to provide for town clerk services during the implementation period. There are various options for this, and further information will be provided later.

Work will also be carried out to look at the services that will be provided by the Council, the staffing establishment and committee structure.

The job description and person specification for the Town Clerk role will then be drafted using the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) model template.

Consideration will be given to whether to appoint an interim Town Clerk for a six to eight month period, thereafter giving the new Council the opportunity to appoint their own Town Clerk.

Key tasks before vesting day

There are a large number of tasks to be completed before vesting day but some of the key areas of focus will be:

- The assets that are proposed to be transferred to the Town Council
- Where the Town Council will be based
- What the staffing establishment will look like
- What the committee structure will look like

- Setting up a robust governance framework including drafting policies and procedures, making sure all legal aspects are in place before the 1 April 2023
- Getting a website designed and up and running before 1 April 2023
- Procuring a Finance system and getting it up and running before 1 April 2023
- Equipping the new Town Council office with items such as computers, telephones and photocopier/scanner
- Branding and logo
- Planning for the May 2023 Town Council elections including a communication strategy to encourage people to stand as Councillors
- Preparation of an induction programme for Councillors and staff

Reporting to Members

Regular progress reports will be provided to:

- Shadow Town Council
- SWT
- SCC