

Taunton Charter Trustees - 23 January 2020

Present: Councillor Francesca Smith (Mayor)

Councillors Sue Lees (Deputy Mayor), Chris Booth, Simon Coles, Caroline Ellis, Marcia Hill, Richard Lees, Libby Lisgo, Martin Peters, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Federica Smith-Roberts, Alan Wedderkopp and Brenda Weston

Officers: Jo Comer, Marcus Prouse and Jackie Evans

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

47. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Lee Baker and Danny Wedderkopp.

48. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees

(Minutes of the meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 2nd October 2019 circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 2nd October 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

49. 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 C Booth	All Items	Wellington and SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Wedderkopp				
Cllr B Weston	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted

50. **Public Participation**

The Clerk advised the Trustees that no members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

51. **Petitions**

The Mayor advised that no petitions had been received.

52. **Deputations**

The Mayor advised that no deputations had been received.

53. **Motions to the Charter Trustees**

The Mayor advised that no motions to the Charter Trustees had been received.

54. **Communications**

The Mayor advised that she had visited The Great Western Hotel in Taunton earlier today as a guest of Spaeda – an Arts Education Charity that had their 20 year launch and it was very interesting to see the work that they undertake.

The Mayor's Concert 'Songs for Springtime' was being held on Saturday 29th February 2020 in aid of the Mayor's Charity and being held at St. James's Church, Taunton. If any Charter Trustees were interested in attending tickets were £10.

Today was the 75th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and Councillors were requested to attend if possible the Holocaust Memorial Service at St. John's Church on the 27th January at midday.

Councillor Smith-Roberts requested that future reports were brought that demonstrated the activities of the Mayor and how busy the role was and that this was minuted in the Charter Trustees documentation. The whereabouts of the Mayor in a given week could be shared, just not exactly when.

Councillor Lisgo also requested that upcoming events were circulated to the Charter Trustees so that Councillors could, if so wished, go along and support the Mayor of Taunton at various events.

Councillor Marcia Hill felt that the Mayoralty needed to be promoted properly on what the role of the Mayor was and this had been a longstanding issue. She

concluded with Cllr Lisgo that a weekly overview of the Mayor's activities would be a useful aide memoire and needed to be re-instated.

Councillor Weston felt that local media may be interested in doing a longer form piece with the Mayor about their role in an average week.

The Mayor was supportive of the proposals and asked Officers to work together to ensure this could be implemented.

55. **To receive and consider reports, minutes and recommendations of the Standing Committee.**

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

- Councillors queried whether criteria was going to be established to help the Standing Committee make decisions in relation to the applications received and whether future applicants were going to be notified of the changes in advance.
- *The Clerk to the Charter Trustees clarified that the revised criteria had been taken to the November meeting of the Standing Committee and had been recommended to be used, but not to implement it until a new municipal year had begun. The Clerk stated that he would be happy to circulate the new forms to all Charter Trustees for comment.*
- The Chair of the Standing Committee commented that the new forms were more in line with the grant giving across the rest of the wider Council and this was felt to be an important principle to follow.
- A request was made that analysis was undertaken to plot how the funds the Charter Trustees distributed and possibly mapped geographically across the entire unparished area to ensure that it was equitable. This could be done by both finance or by sector and could also demonstrate that the funding enabled matched funding opportunities.
- Some councillors cautioned against drawing too tight a definition on benefit to the Unparished Area of Taunton and that funding of events which drew in visitors that spent monies in Taunton was an important consideration.
- It was felt right that the funds were primarily for the benefit of Taunton residents rather than visitors and the point was made that Parish Councils spend their money for the benefit of their parishes. The task of attracting visitors into Taunton was felt to be a wider responsibility of the District Council.
- *The Clerk advised that conditions can and had been attached to recent bid applications that stipulate benefit to particular areas of the Unparished area, for example, with Taunton Area Parenting Support.*

RESOLVED that the Charter Trustees noted the recommendations of the Standing Committee of the Charter Trustees of Taunton, approved by the Mayor of Taunton.

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

Councillor Lisgo asked the following question;

Although we are well served by The Clerk to the Charter Trustees there is a restriction on the amount of time that can be spent on work relating to the Charter Trustees. When the Charter Trustees were established last year most of us agreed that we were seeing ourselves as a stopgap to a Parish or Town Council of some description. In order to achieve that we have to progress the Community Governance Review. Since we had that discussion we have not seen any further updates on this matter, is it the job of the Charter Trustees to oversee that or is it somebody else's responsibility, and if so, who might that be?

The Clerk to the Charter Trustees responded that preparations for the Community Governance Review had been interrupted by the General Election that had taken place between the last meeting in October 2019. The whole of the Governance team would have a part to play in ensuring the review was undertaken. The intention as per the timetable shared previously was to bring the draft Terms of Reference to a future meeting of the Charter Trustees in March 2019 for comment. The responsibility for the Community Governance Review sat with the District Council.

Councillor Smith-Roberts clarified that from an SWT perspective the relevant portfolio holder with oversight of the Community Governance review was Cllr Ross Henley, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources.

Councillor Coles questioned whether the Terms of Reference would just look at the Unparished Area of Taunton or undertake a wider scope?

The Clerk to the Charter Trustees stated that the Draft Terms of Reference would provide this clarity but that the intention was to undertake a District-wide review as it was known there were other anomalous boundaries across the District.

57. **Taunton Charter Trustees Budget 2020/2021**

The Mayor introduced the item which set out the proposed Budget for the forthcoming year.

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

- A question was raised as to whether Somerset West and Taunton Council was intending to continue to raise Special Expenses on the Unparished Area (whilst separate from this Budget) would enable the Unparished Area to still benefit from projects on a smaller scale that a Town/Parish Council usually provided?
- *The Clerk to the Charter Trustees clarified that the budget paper before Councillors only dealt with the costs associated with the Charter Trustees which were mainly around the Mayoralty and Civic Function. The*

discussions around the decision as to whether levy Special Expenses were still ongoing and this would be ultimately decided at the SWT Budget Setting meeting on the 19th February 2020. Officers were in negotiations with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to investigate this.

- Cllr Smith-Roberts clarified that as Leader of SWT the administration had supported Officers to investigate precepting for Special Expenses on the Unparished Area of Taunton with MHCLG, as previously undertaken. MHCLG had been told that with the advent of the Charter Trustees Special Expenses were no longer going to be levied as Officers had originally understood Charter Trustees to be able to be able to precept for things much like a Town Council which they cannot do so. Secretary of State Approval was still being awaited for approval but it was envisioned this would be resolved before Budget Setting at the District level.
- *The Clerk to the Charter Trustees confirmed that the precepting power of the Charter Trustees was separate to the SWT power to request to precept for Special Expenses.*
- Comment was made that Somerset West and Taunton had expected that Charter Trustees for Taunton were going to be in many regards like a Town Council when in fact the restrictions imposed on what Charter Trustees could precept for meant it was not. The Special Expenses would be able to achieve some things but could not fund the full breadth of activities that a Town/Parish Council could with the amount expected and the District had to be cognisant of that and take steps to remedy in the short-term. The residents of the Unparished Area would continue to be significantly disadvantaged until then.
- There was a current amount of around £22,000 in the biddable pot and this would be clarified if this could be carried forward for future years to be distributed by the Standing Committee of the Charter Trustees.
- The Mayor requested that the Budget report and the Accommodation line was amended to reduce the number of Standing Committee meetings was reduced from eight to four.
- *The Clerk to the Charter Trustees clarified that this would reduce the amount precepted for from £2640 to £1760 for accommodation and the total figure reduced from £52,020 to £51,140 and from £3.40 to £3.34 on a Band D Property.*
- Councillor Marcia Hill seconded the Mayor's proposal and Councillors supported the amendment.
- Comment was made that the charging of a commercial rate for accommodation was an aspect that could be considered unfair and was being used to push undue costs onto the Charter Trustees.
- It was suggested that the start times of the meeting could be changed so that a Security Guard would not need to be used as is the case for all evening meetings at The Deane House.
- Concern was raised of the difficulty of forging a separate identity whilst still holding the meetings in the District Council's offices.
- *The costs of the hire of The Deane House were comparable to the Albemarle Centre and other commercial room hire facilities in the town. The removal of the security guard costs would equate to only £360 for the year.*

- Councillors requested a more detailed understanding of the Mayoral Activities and Events Budget line.
- Officers had investigated the spend associated with the former Mayor of Taunton Deane in previous years to come up with an estimated cost for the forthcoming year. The budget set for 19/20 had been set at a prudent £15,000 but this was likely to be underspent. A further report on the final spends for the 19/20 would be brought back in due course after the end of the financial year.
- A query was raised as to the elimination of a potential Mayoral Small Grants pot that had been included in previous versions of the paper?
- *This had originally been included but following feedback at the meetings in advance of this one had been removed, as its purpose seemed vague and the Special Expenses was felt to be the priority to ensure was kept.*
- The Mayor raised that the Alderman Spear's Contribution to the Mayor's Christmas fund for the needy of Taunton at Christmas could fulfil this role.
- *A further report would be brought back to a meeting of the Charter Trustees detailing this fund and its proposed future.*
- It was raised that it would be beneficial if the Charter Trustees could in some way reward young people in the town for their contributions. It was requested that the Civic links and the Civic Dinners with the Twinning Groups involved young people. Bridgwater and Taunton College catering students could be involved in catering for these dinners which would involve young people and also reduce the costs.
- The Mayor encouraged that this idea was communicated to the Twinning Groups.
- Cllr Lisgo requested that the concerns expressed during the debate were recorded and communicated to the rest of SWT Council.

Councillor Marcia Hill proposed the substantive motion which was seconded by Councillor Prior-Sankey.

RESOLVED that the Charter Trustees for Taunton set a precept for the financial year 2020/2021 at the amount of £51,140, to be collected on their behalf from the Unparished Area of Taunton ratepayers by Somerset West and Taunton as the billing authority. This is equivalent to £3.34 expenditure per Band D property.

58. **Mayor Making for 2020/21**

Following the meeting of the Charter Trustees on 7th August 2019, where the presumption was supported that the person taking up the Mayor of Taunton role was presumed to serve in the role for two consecutive years, it was requested that the Charter Trustees consent to being content with not undertaking a wider nomination process in February 2020 but to confirm the presumed nominees at this meeting. The Mayor Making ceremony where these nominations would be voted on would still take place at the Annual General Meeting or Mayor Making in May/June 2020.

Both Councillors Francesca Smith and Sue Lees declared that they would wish to continue in their roles for a second consecutive year.

Councillor Prior-Sankey proposed that Councillor Francesca Smith be nominated to take up the role of Mayor of Taunton for the municipal year 2020/21. This was seconded by Councillor Coles.

The nomination form was thus signed by the proposer and seconder.

Councillor Coles proposed that Councillor Sue Lees be nominated to take up the role of Deputy Mayor of Taunton for the municipal year 2020/21. This was seconded by Councillor Booth.

The nomination form was thus signed by the proposer and seconder.

59. **Appointment of External Auditors**

RESOLVED that the Charter Trustees for Taunton approved the appointment of external auditors PKF Littlejohn made under the central appointments regime The Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA).

(The Meeting ended at 7.20 pm)