

## Taunton Charter Trustees - 27 August 2020 held via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Councillor Francesca Smith (Mayor)

Councillors Sue Lees (Deputy Mayor), Lee Baker, Chris Booth, Simon Coles, Caroline Ellis, Richard Lees, Martin Peters, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp and Brenda Weston

Officers: Jo Comer and Marcus Prouse

Also Present: Councillor Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

### 14. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Hill, Lisgo, Perry, Prior-Sankey and Smith-Roberts.

### 15. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees

(Minutes of the meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 29<sup>th</sup> April and 9<sup>th</sup> June were circulated with the agenda)

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 29<sup>th</sup> April and 9<sup>th</sup> June were confirmed as a correct record.

### 16. 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 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 M Peters	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Wedderkopp	All Items	SCC & SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr D Wedderkopp	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet & SWT	Personal	Spoke

## 17. Public Participation

One member of the public submitted a statement which was read out on their behalf:

### 1) Mr Chris Mann

I am pleased that the four Somerset district councils are not opposed to a unitary authority.

Firstly, because two tier causes misallocation of income and priorities between district and county that would not happen under a single unitary council. While Somerset County Council has struggled with funding essential social and child care, your council seems to have plenty of money for diverse projects.

Secondly, because the cumulative savings are huge. If councillors had voted for a unitary authority in 2007, they could have saved their citizens £200m in total annual savings plus £89m by not approving the defensive Southwest One, the unnecessary Ignite transformation and recent property renovation and speculation.

Devolving some services to parish and town councils if they want it would bring new clarity, focus, democracy and authority to the area where people actually live, especially to 30,000 Taunton citizens who don't have a town council.

I have always considered council tax very expensive for what it delivers compared to income tax, and I am impressed with the One Somerset business case. The One Somerset programme director has over ten years' experience with Wiltshire Council during which period it became a successful single unitary council with 500,000 residents.

A single unitary Somerset council with 560,000 citizens would be better than two unitaries in matching the health system area critical to support an ageing population and thereby avoid the need for time-consuming negotiations across two authorities. One authority avoids unbalance and a larger concentration of deprivation in the west, and would also most reduce costs by properly utilising the massive improvements in communications and technology over the last 50 years. A single unitary has the big advantage over two unitaries of twice the annual transition savings, nearly four times the estimated five year savings and the shortest payback time.

Of course, it also gives the strongest voice for Somerset.

## 18. Petitions

The Clerk advised that no petitions had been received.

19. **Motions to the Charter Trustees**

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

20. **Communications**

The Mayor of Taunton advised that she had recently attended the opening of the Turmeric Kitchen restaurant in Station Road and she wished them well in their new venture.

The Mayor of Taunton also hosted the VJ Day commemorations at 40 Commando and thanked the commanding officer Simon Rodgers and his staff for making the day possible. The Mayor had also attended the VJ Day commemoration evensong at Wells Cathedral and also had laid a wreath at Vivary Park, Taunton.

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

No questions were asked under Standing Order 8.

22. **To receive and consider reports, minutes and recommendations of the Standing Committee (if any)**

The Clerk to the Taunton Charter Trustees advised that the Decision sheets would be formally attached to the next meeting Agenda, however he verbally advised that the Standing Committee had met on the 30<sup>th</sup> July and awarded the following amounts from the Unparished Area Small Grants Scheme.

1) Unlocking Potential Somerset - A bid to support the costs of running one of the three, three year 'Insights to Apprenticeships' programmes being run across the Taunton Deane area and specifically the UPA. (The bid is for £12,000 per annum with a total expected cost of £36,000 over the life of the three year project.)

RECOMMENDATION: The Standing Committee recommended the approval of £12,000 to cover the first year of the project, with an 'in principle' agreement for the remaining £24,000 for the two subsequent years which would be earmarked in subsequent financial years if available. The applicants were requested to provide an annual progress report.

2) Stoke Road Allotments CIC – A bid for a contribution of half the total costs towards capital works related to the irrigation of the allotment. (The bid is for £550 of the £1100 total).

RECOMMENDATION: The Standing Committee recommended the approval of the bid for the amount requested (£550).

23. **Annual Governance Statement 2019/20**

The Clerk advised that the report had been circulated. The Clerk advised that part of the requirements for a Charter Trustee body, which had been established in the Unparished Area the previous year by Statutory Instrument, was an offer to become part of the Small Auditors Appointments Regime (SAAA), which the Charter Trustees had accepted previously to be a part of. Every year the Charter Trustees will need to submit an Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements for audit, to ensure that the proper use of public funds is being discharged.

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

- The Mayor of Taunton affirmed that she would apply the wet signature to the documents the next day if approved, which would then be sent off electronically.

**RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020 for submission to the Taunton Charter Trustees External Auditors, PKF Littlejohn LLP.

24. **Accounting Statements 2019/2020**

The Mayor of Taunton advised that the Draft Accounting Statements for 2019/2020 had been circulated as part of the Agenda.

**RESOLVED** to approve the Draft Accounting Statements 2019/2020 for submission to the Charter Trustee's external Auditors, PKF Littlejohn LLP.

25. **For Information - Research into the effect of any potential Government Unitary Orders on the Unparished Area of Taunton**

The Mayor of Taunton advised the Charter Trustees that this was not an item for discussion, but that she had asked the Clerk to provide an update now that there was a proposal for Unitary coming forward. The Mayor welcomed Councillor Whetlor as a Somerset Association of Local Councils representative.

The Clerk advised that there was still a lot of unknowns in this area, but from reading the One Somerset Business Case, there was reference to "*At present there is an Unparished area in Taunton. In order for the arrangements described in this Section to operate effectively across the whole unitary council area, the unitary council Shadow Executive would request a community governance review during the transition phase to enable a Taunton Town Council to be created and in place by vesting day.*"

The Clerk advised that there had been discussion at this body of the District Council undertaking a Community Governance Review, so it was presumed that whichever option was chosen by the Government, a Community Governance Review would need to be undertaken before establishment of a successor body.

Councillor Coles raised the issue of the Boundary Commission and the need for guidance when looking at those areas of Taunton Town that were part parished and part Unparished.

(The Meeting ended at 6.20 pm)