

Taunton Charter Trustees - 16 March 2021 held via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Councillor Francesca Smith (Mayor)

Councillors Sue Lees, Lee Baker, Chris Booth, Simon Coles, Caroline Ellis, Marcia Hill, Richard Lees, Libby Lisgo, Derek Perry, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Federica Smith-Roberts and Brenda Weston

Officers: Jo Comer, Marcus Prouse and Amy Tregellas

Also Present: Councillor Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm)

37. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Martin Peters.

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

(Minutes of the meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 10th December 2020 circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Taunton Charter Trustees held on 10th December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

39. 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 L Lisgo	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	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 B Weston	All Items	SWT	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke

Cllr H Prior-Sankey declared a personal interest in relation to Item 13 – Appointment of a Platinum Jubilee Champion, as her husband was the Assistant Secretary of the Rotary Club in Taunton and had written the letter included within the Agenda pack.

40. **Public Participation**

The Charter Trustees were advised that no members of the public had requested to speak or ask questions.

41. **Petitions**

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

42. **Motions to the Charter Trustees**

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

43. **Communications**

The Mayor advised of the different events she had recently taken part in since the previous meeting of the Charter Trustees. The Mayor had attended that morning a meeting of the Taunton Heritage Trust as Patron.

Attached with the Agenda were further details of the vouchers which were distributed to those in need at Christmas, funded by the Alderman Spears contribution to the Mayor's Christmas Fund. In January the Mayor had attended the Somerset Scouts AGM.

For Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27th 2021, the Mayor had released a video of a poem reading. The Mayor had also attended several Town Centre Working Group meetings as one of the Charter Trustee's representatives alongside Councillor Derek Perry. The Mayor advised that she would be writing to the Bishop of Bath and Wells as he had recently announced their retirement, to wish him well in his retirement and thank him for all his support. The Legal Service usually held at Wells Cathedral is being held virtually on Sunday 21st March which she hoped to attend. The Deputy Mayor will be attending the Carnival Committee in the Mayor's absence. The Mayor thanked Jo Comer, Civic Specialist, on behalf of the Charter Trustees for delivering to the Police, Fire and Ambulance Services biscuits to thank them for their work, which usually would have been done at Christmas time but had to wait until the end of February due to the lockdown situation.

Cllr Lisgo requested further information and feedback to be circulated on the Town Centre Working Group in due course. The Mayor advised that she would confirm when these details could be shared more widely.

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

No questions were put by any Charter Trustee.

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

The Clerk advised members of the two decision notices which had been included within the Agenda pack. The first one set out the process for sign-off which would now be undertaken by the SWT Corporate Resources Portfolio Holder. The second decision form related to the last Standing Committee recommendations which had been approved in November. The Clerk had sent around a further update on the Whirligig Lane proposal via email earlier in the week.

Cllr Smith-Roberts advised that further conversations were needed on the Whirligig Lane matter, as it was understood to be a County Council asset that the Charter Trustees would like to see improved. It was disappointing that the County Council were not repairing the lane to a Heritage standard and/or covering the costs of this repair. She suggested that a letter was written to the Leader of the County Council to explain this in depth and get the involvement of more senior Councillors and Officers at the County Council. Councillor Prior-Sankey supported this and recommended Alyn Jones and Michele Cusack should be approached to establish what the issues are. Councillor Perry cautioned against setting a precedent. The Mayor requested officers to seek further clarification and a potential partnership on these matters before the next meeting of the Charter Trustees. Cllr Smith-Roberts suggested that there needed to be a mechanism for raising the public's concern on this matter to the County Council.

Councillor Lisgo queried that the change in decision maker sign-off from the Mayor of Taunton to the SWT Corporate Resources Portfolio Holder, that the best interests of the Charter Trustees were to be maintained?

The Clerk clarified that the change occurred in consultation with the SWT s151 Officer who had advised that the Charter Trustees should only have direct control over those funds needed to manage their own responsibilities for the Taunton Mayoralty.

46. **Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton**

The Mayor advised that the Governance Manager of SWT was in attendance to speak to this item and explain the next steps.

The Governance Manager explained that a report was to be taken to SWT Full Council on the 30th March 2021 requesting a cross party working group is set up to look at the Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton. The recommendations reinforced that the former Taunton Deane Borough Council had resolved to undertake this, with a view to a new entity being set up by May 2023, and would tie into Unitarisation plans for 1st April 2023. Whilst Charter Trustees would be kept informed via regular progress reports, the responsibility for the review still sat with Somerset West and Taunton Council. A timetable was attached to the report as an Annex.

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

- In regards to the Working Group, it was queried as to whether the significant number of Taunton based Councillors who had an interest in this matter would be ensured a place?
- *The decision was for SWT Full Council, but if Council was minded to agree the Group Leaders would come forward with the names of the appropriate Councillors on said Group. Members of the Executive could serve on the Working Group. Individual Councillors could respond to the consultation as well as the Charter Trustees as a body, and other Parish Councils on the boundary.*
- Concern was raised that there was sufficient staff resource to carry out this exercise?
- *The Governance team had a high workload and this project would be prioritised, a business case for extra resource would be taken to the Senior Management Team but this was not required at this moment in time. Other teams would be involved such as Communications and Elections.*
- A suggestion was made that a pre-agreement for extra resource was put in place before starting this work.
- What would be the position of the Charter Trustees if there were multiple parishes wished to be set up being the ultimate outcome of this exercise?
- *The Charter Trustees and Taunton Mayoralty would remain in existence until any future arrangements were stood up, the Working Group would look at the options and their impact on the Taunton Mayoralty.*
- It was raised as to why the option for a Town Council had not been identified as the proposed option already, as other localities of a similar size had this form of Governance and could SWT promote this as the preferred choice?
- *No option was off the table at the moment, but once the Working Group was set up and the preferred option was a Town Council that it is narrowed down when the Terms of Reference is considered, but it is inappropriate to do so at this stage.*
- There was a need for the Charter Trustees to have on their Agenda regularly to have a discussion and collectively feedback viewpoints to the Working Group.
- *The Working Group would be expected to meet with the Charter Trustees to understand their views.*

- It was requested that the recommendation was amended to reflect that a Town Council as well as a Parish Council was a potential option.
- *This would be taken on board and happy to be made more explicit.*
- It was urged that this process was kept as simple as possible.
- It was queried whether the Charter Trustees would continue if the area remained Unparished under a unitary position?
- *This would need to be investigated and legal advice sought.*
- Concern was raised as to how the Working Group would balance the strength and number of responses received from various parties to ensure justice and a fair result was given to the residents of the Unparished area?
- *A communications plan would outline how there would be an equality of opportunity to comment on the plans.*
- It was suggested that just looking at the Unparished area may be a simpler exercise now and then in a few years' time the question of including other Parishes nearby was looked at again rather than now.
- A query was raised as to whether the unitary campaigns were still suggesting that a Minister would be able to just take a decision to parish the Taunton area and thus make the Review redundant.
- *At the Somerset Monitoring Officers Group meetings, this review was discussed and Somerset County Council were keen for this to get underway and deliver the new arrangements by 1st April 2023. It would be a surprise for this process to be interrupted once underway and the Charter Trustees would expect to be consulted as the representatives of the Unparished Area of Taunton.*
- A query was raised as to the typical powers of a Parish/Town Council and what powers the new body would have?
- *The legal duties of a Town/Parish Council are clearly laid out in statute. As part of the scoping during the process, conversations with Officers would be expected to take place around Assets etc. in readiness for the Shadow arrangements.*
- It was commented that it would be a Shadow Unitary Authority that would be negotiating with the Shadow Parish or Town Council grouping.

RESOLVED that a letter be written on behalf of the Charter Trustees for Taunton to the SWT Corporate Resources Portfolio Holder to urge him to ensure that the Community Governance Review is considered SWT Council's highest corporate priority in the forthcoming year, in relation to governance matters under his portfolio. The letter was to also urge that resources are in place to complete this task, with a contingency built in now, so that if unexpected matters do arise in year this project does not get waylaid. The letter would highlight that with an impending decision on unitary status expected soon, it is considered fundamentally essential that this project is progressed at this time, so that the residents of Taunton do not continue to suffer any democratic deficit by the time any new unitary authority is stood up. Copies of the letter would be sent to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government, as well as the One Somerset and Stronger Somerset campaigns to ensure they are aware of the forthcoming Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton.

47. **Appointment of Internal Auditor**

Following the recommendations of the External Auditor PKF Littlejohn LLP in their Notice of conclusion of audit – Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the year ended 31 March 2020, that *“In future years, the smaller authority must maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems”*. Officers had sought quotations from various companies.

RESOLVED that the Taunton Charter Trustees appoint IAC Audit & Consultancy Ltd as their Internal Auditor for the 2020/21 and 2021/2022 municipal years.

48. **Purchase of Past Mayor and Past Consort Badges**

The Clerk introduced the item, which set out the quotes obtained and clarified the total expected price, which would be £1700 for the die and one copy of each. Past Mayor and Consort badges were given in recognition of the significant commitment made in undertaking the role, as an award to acknowledge and thank them for their contribution.

RESOLVED in principle to approve the purchase of x1 Past Mayor Pendant and x1 Past Consort Badge, to be funded from the Mayoral Civic Activity Budget, subject to final amendment of the design taking into account the comments provided.

49. **Appointment of Platinum Jubilee Champion**

The Rotary Club of Taunton was hosting an on-line gathering of as many ‘Jubilee champions’ as wished to attend. The initial get-together would take place at 7pm on Wednesday 24 March 2021, a meeting of an informal liaison group to share information about activities to celebrate The Queen’s Platinum (70th) Jubilee.

Councillors Booth and Francesca Smith would attend the meeting in an informal capacity and report back. If required to nominate a formal representative this could be affirmed at a future meeting of the Charter Trustees.

50. **Mayor Making 21/22**

As per the adopted processes of the Charter Trustees, the Clerk had written to all those who met the criteria asking if they wished to be considered in February, with announcements normally made in March, except during an election year. The Clerk had received two valid nominations for taking on the roles of Mayor of Taunton and Deputy Mayor of Taunton in 2021/2022, one for each role and the nominations period closed on 19th February 2021.

Councillor Richard Lees has proposed that current Deputy Mayor Councillor Susan Lees be nominated to take up the role of Mayor of Taunton for the municipal year 2021/22. This has been seconded by Councillor Simon Coles.

Councillor Francesca Smith has proposed that Councillor Brenda Weston be nominated to take up the role of Deputy Mayor of Taunton for the municipal year 2021/22. This has been seconded by Councillor Lee Baker. These nominations had been considered valid by the Clerk.

The Mayor Making ceremony where these nominations are to be affirmed is still expected to take place at the Annual General Meeting of the Taunton Charter Trustees in June 2021, but as each position is uncontested there was no need to undertake any further selection processes.

Councillors congratulated Cllrs Lees and Weston and wished them well for their Mayoral year.

(The Meeting ended at 7.55 pm)