

# Taunton Shadow Town Council

**1st December 2022**

## Taunton Town Council Office Accommodation

**This matter is the responsibility of SWT Executive Councillor Mike Rigby (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation incl. Asset Management)**

**Report Author: Chris Hall - Deputy CEO and Director of Place and Climate Change**

### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 This report sets out an option for accommodating the office and meeting space needs of the to be created Taunton Town Council, it provides stability for that Council in the short term without tying them into a lengthy commercial lease. The space proposed is a separate room on the Ground Floor of Deane House with external access and use of shared kitchen and toilet facilities.
- 1.2 The decision on accommodation is needed as a matter of urgency so that ICT and telephony arrangements can be put in place, these are expected to have long lead in times with suppliers.
- 1.3 The report seeks to cover the roles of Somerset West and Taunton Council with a view to the impacts on Somerset Council, as well as giving consideration to the needs of the Taunton Town Council.
- 1.4 Somerset West and Taunton Council are able to make this offer without impacting on current working arrangements in Deane House. There is no negative impact on the Somerset Council as office rationalisation decisions have yet to be approved and the initial lease offered is limited to 12 months.

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Taunton Shadow Town Council are requested to make comment on the report and recommendations:
- 2.2 SWT Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation/ Deputy CEO & Director of Place and Climate Change approve that:
- 2.3 The accommodation requirements for the 'to be' Taunton Town Council are agreed and a lease is entered into for 12 months starting on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.
- 2.4 It is further recommended that consent is given to allow works to that space to

commence under licence in the lead up to the lease start date.

### **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 Taunton Town Council (TTC) require office accommodation for employees and councillors, failure to establish this in a timely manner will delay the ICT and telephony infrastructure being in place for day 1 of that new authority.
- 3.2 Somerset West and Taunton council are not currently using this space and so a lease can be offer and agreed quickly without impact on other users of the building.
- 3.3 This recommendation has been shared with the joint chair of the Asset Optimisation Workstream. There were some initial concerns as to how further occupation of Deane House might impact on the office space rationalisation work underway. It was explained that this is spare capacity in Deane House and given its location is unlikely to have any impact on SWT/Somerset Council or others use of the building. The risk to the office rationalisation work is minimal and the length of the lease reduces any impact even further.
- 3.4 TTC, once vested might decide it does not want to retain space in Deane House, or the space offered might be deemed not to be suitable in future once in situ. The co-location of the Town Council and Somerset Council services should be considered as a positive step and a convenience for the public. At this stage we don't not know how much space would be required by the Town Council, however this space offered within the lease would be sufficient for the foreseeable employee numbers in the first 12 months.
- 3.5 The lease offered prevents TTC being bound, beyond 12 months, to a space that as yet cannot be defined. Officers are reluctant to make such a financial commitment for a future body without TTC being involved in scoping their requirements. Their requirements are likely to be reflected by their role in the direct delivery of services, at present there is only one employee planned to be in place for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023, but it is likely that this will grow as they bed in. The space on offer allows for this without being unduly large or costly.
- 3.6 **Consideration of other options**
- 3.7 TTC would be required to evidence best value to the public for their costs. Whilst no exercise has been undertaken to explore external options for the Town Council the costs identified for the use of Deane House are in line with the other commercial users of the building, which include both private and public tenants.
- 3.8 Officers had held investigatory meetings and site visits when looking at the possibility of the usage of other publicly owned buildings within Taunton and none are currently available and require further appraisal. This appraisal exercise can be undertaken in the first year by the Town Council.

### **4 Background and Full details of the Report**

- 4.1 TTC will require a base from which to operate from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.
- 4.2 There is no available specification of their needs as that has yet to be established. In

order to ensure they have an accessible and flexible space in time for their first day of operation capacity in Deane House is proposed on a 12-month lease.

- 4.3 The proposed area for the lease is 61m<sup>2</sup> and is flexible enough to be used for workstations and small private meetings. It is a separate room on the ground floor of Deane House with external access and use of shared kitchen and toilet facilities.
- 4.4 The financial terms offered are the same as those for other tenants in the building. In addition TTC will be able to hire committee room space for its meetings. TTC will need to work around and requirements of Somerset Council who will always take priority. However, the expectation is that there will be fewer clashes due to the likelihood of TTC meetings taking place in the evenings. The expectation is that the Town Council will be able to make use of the webcasting/AV equipment already in situ in the room or its successor.
- 4.5 The recommendations of this report ensure the Town Council have a space sufficient for their initial needs whilst also providing an income to Somerset Council.
- 4.6 If the co-location or the space offered is not sufficient the 12 month lease gives TTC time to establish their needs and review the market for accommodation elsewhere.
- 4.7 At present there is a parking allocation of two spaces included within the lease costs. Town Council meetings would be expected to take place after 6pm when the charging regime for the Deane House public car park finishes, so this should not have an adverse effect on elected Town Councillors.

## 5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 The Community Governance Review for Taunton was a key project within the Internal Operations Directorate Plan and links to the Corporate Strategy.

## 6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 The rent offered is at £12.50 per sq ft plus £6.80 per sq ft for the service charge, this reflects the indexed position of all other lettings at Deane House.

**Table 1:** Summary revenue costs to TTC:

Item	Cost
Rent pa	£8,207.55
Service charge pa	£4,465.00
Insurance pa (estimated)	£70.00
Rates pa (estimated)	£2,700
Committee room hire (estimated 10 times pa x 4 hours @ £45 per hour (£175 for a 4 hour booking), plus Security guard costs of £15 per hour- total = £235	£2,350
<b>Total (including estimates)</b>	<b>£17,792.55</b>

- 6.2 There would be additional costs to TTC of £60 per hour for the hire of the committee room

- 6.3 The accommodation budget for TTC is £34,000 pa annum and therefore this represents a saving to them in the first year of circa £16,000

### **Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications**

- 6.4 The Section 24 Direction stipulates that consent of the County Council's executive is required for expenditure that exceeds certain criteria or for the disposal of an asset. Neither criteria are triggered by this lease if approved.
- 6.5 As per the Letter from the County Solicitor of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 SWT and SCC will work collaboratively to implement the recommendations on the CGR and to stand up Taunton Town Council in advance of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023;
- 6.6 "The parties agree that the recommendations in the CGR should be implemented as effectively and efficiently as possible. In our discussions it has been clear that this objective would best be achieved by working closely with the District Council whose officers supported and advised their Council on the conduct and recommendations in the CGR."

### **7 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 SWT Council has no legal duty to provide accommodation space to TTC.
- 7.2 Any arrangements will be recorded in the form of a lease and if necessary a licence for work required prior to the commencement of the lease.

### **8 Climate, Ecology and Sustainability Implications**

- 8.1 There are no identified climate, ecological, or sustainability implications.

### **9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 9.1 There are no identified safeguarding or community safety implications.

### **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 There are no identified equality or diversity implications with Deane House being a fully accessible building.

### **11 Social Value Implications**

- 11.1 There are no identified social value implications.

### **12 Partnership Implications**

- 12.1 There are no identified partnership implications.

### **13 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 13.1 There are no identified health and wellbeing implications.

## **14 Asset Management Implications**

14.1 See the main body of the report.

## **15 Data Protection Implications**

15.1 There are no identified data protection implications.

## **16 Consultation Implications**

16.1 There are no identified consultation implications. The Shadow Town Council will be consulted on the proposal as per their designated role to act as an advisory body on the work being undertaken to set up a Town Council for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

### **Contact Officers**

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