

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Special Full Council – 3 March 2022

Community governance review of the unparished area of Taunton and adjoining parishes – results of first stage consultation and draft recommendations

This matter is the responsibility of the Community Governance Review Working Group

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1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Council established a Working Group of councillors to consider the creation of a Taunton Town Council. As the only part of the county of Somerset not to be parished, it was considered that there was a need to undertake a community governance review without further delay due to the need to engage with the new Somerset Council on the proposed devolution framework for town and parish councils across Somerset. On 19 October 2021 the Council considered a set of options presented by the Working Group and resolved to commence a community governance review of the unparished area of Taunton and eight adjoining parish areas with the intention to implement a town council for all or part of that area.
- 1.2 The community governance review commenced on 12 November 2021 with a first stage of public consultation running from the 17th November until 12 January 2022.
- 1.3 This report sets out the responses received during that first stage consultation and proposes draft recommendations to be subject to further public consultation and a revised timetable for the remaining stages of the review.
- 1.4 **Note re: terminology:** A principal council may, following a community governance review, create, abolish, or alter the area of any parish within its area and may establish a parish council to serve a newly created parish. Once established a parish council serving an urban area may resolve to be called a town council. It is thought likely that any parish council established to serve Taunton will do so. Therefore, this report uses the term parish/town council when referring to the possible creation of a new Taunton Parish Council. In addition to the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, legislation relating to parishes can also be found in the Local Government Act 1972 (in particular, provision about parish meetings and councils, the constitution of a parish meeting, the constitution and powers of parish councils and about parish councillors).

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Council confirms that it has considered and takes into account the responses received to the first stage consultation on the community governance review of the unparished area of Taunton and eight adjoining parishes together with the recommendations of the Community Governance Review Working Group as detailed below and in this report.
- 2.2 That the Council adopts and agrees to the Community Governance Review Working Group's preferred option for Taunton and the area under review for the purposes of conducting the Stage 2 Consultation. The draft recommendations of the Community Governance Review Working Group to be subject to a second round of consultation are as follows:
- A. That a single parish be created to serve the currently unparished areas of Taunton and that in addition:
- (i) Comeytrove Parish Council be abolished, and the entire area of Comeytrove Parish be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.
 - (ii) The Killams Green area, currently within Trull Parish Council area, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.
 - (iii) The part of the forthcoming development in the south-west corner of Taunton that currently falls within Trull Parish should be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.
 - (iv) The boundary of Trull Parish to the north-west of Cotlake Hill be altered to follow the green wedge around the Sherford urban area, with the small area to the south of that boundary that is currently within the unparished area of Taunton becoming part of Trull Parish.
 - (v) The area covered by the Maidenbrook Ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council, including several sites earmarked for housing development in the near future, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.
 - (vi) The urban parts of Staplegrove Parish, including the entirety of the forthcoming development in the north-west corner of Taunton, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.
 - (vii) The slim part of Staplegrove Parish jutting to the west of Silk Mills Lane be included within the boundary of Norton Fitzwarren Parish.
 - (viii) If the proposed changes bring about a remaining Staplegrove Parish area of fewer than 150 electors, that remaining area be merged with Kingston St. Mary Parish.
 - (ix) A small southern portion of the Kingston St. Mary Parish area, representing that part of the proposed Staplegrove East development that falls within the parish, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.
 - (x) With the exception of Galmington Trading Estate and a small section south of the A38 near Rumwell, no part of Bishops Hull Parish should become part of the proposed new Taunton Parish, and the small triangular residential area at the cross-section with Wellington Road, currently within the unparished area, should become part of Bishops Hull Parish.
 - (xi) The Hankridge Retail Park, Creech Castle and the associated Toneyway Road, currently within West Monkton Parish, be included within the boundary

of the proposed new Taunton Parish, which should run along the railway to the M5.

- (xii) The boundary between Norton Fitzwarren Parish and Bishops Hull Parish, just north of Mill Cottages, be amended to follow the route of the railway line.
- (xiii) Further consideration be given to whether the current boundary between West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine parishes between Maidenbrook and Yallands Hill south of the Country Park should be amended, for example by following the A3259 westwards to Maidenbrook Lane, in the light of any comments from the respective parish councils.

- B. That the new parish be named 'Taunton Parish' and that a parish council be established to serve the new parish with effect from 1 April 2023.
- C. That with the exception of the area described at A(xi) above, the area of West Monkton Parish Council be completely removed from further consideration of the review and its inclusion in any new Taunton Parish/Town Council.
- D. That the area of Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council be completely removed from further consideration of the review and its inclusion in any new Taunton Parish/Town Council.
- E. That the first elections to the proposed new Parish/Town Council for Taunton should be held on the ordinary day of elections (the first Thursday in May) in 2023.
- F. That the Council established to serve the proposed new Taunton Parish should have a council size of at least 20 councillors, with the final number to be determined in the context of the proposals to be developed in regard to the warding arrangements within the new parish.
- G. That the proposed new Taunton Parish be warded and that draft proposals for the warding arrangements, and those of any other warded parishes in the area under review, be developed for inclusion in the second stage of consultation.
- H. That no change be made to the number of Parish Councillors of any of the other continuing parishes within the area under review.

2.3 That a revised timetable for the second stage consultation and the remaining stages of the community governance review be agreed as set out in paragraph 11.3 to this report, including meeting(s) of the Working Group and Council, if necessary, to agree the final content of the second stage consultation.

2.4 That subject to 2.3 above, authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer and Monitoring Officer or Deputy, after consultation with the Community Governance Review Working Group and the Leader of the Council to agree the detailed arrangements for the second stage consultation and to take any other action necessary to progress the community governance review in accordance with legislation and statutory guidance.

2.5 A plan illustrating the proposed changes to parish and ward boundaries that would result from implementation of the draft recommendations above is set out at Appendix A to this report. In addition, full details of the Working Group's considerations, the reasons for each of its recommendations and detailed maps illustrating each proposed change are

at Appendix B to this report.

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 Any risks associated with this Review have been discussed clearly with the Member Working Group as the meetings have proceeded so that the Councillors on the Group could take an informed judgement of the situation, and these considerations are included in the report where relevant to the recommendations.
- 3.2 Outstanding risks arising from the Secretary of State's decision to bring forward the ordinary county and parish council elections in Somerset from May 2023 to 5 May 2022 and the Returning Officer's proposed publication of the Notice of Election for those polls during the scheduled second stage consultation on the community governance review are mitigated by the recommendation above to delay the launch of that second stage consultation until after 5 May 2022.
- 3.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is attached at Appendix 'C' to this report.

4 Background – Community Governance Reviews

- 4.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act') provides that a principal council may review and make changes to the governance arrangements for parishes and parish/town councils in its area.
- 4.2 The procedure for making decisions on these matters is a community governance review. This is a review of the whole or part of the district with a view to making recommendations on one or more of the following:
- Creating, merging or abolishing parishes;
 - Boundary alterations between existing parishes;
 - The naming of parishes and the style of new parishes;
 - The establishment of parish councils;
 - Electoral arrangements for parish councils (the year of election; number of councillors; warding), and/or
 - Grouping parishes under a common parish council or de-grouping parishes.
- 4.3 A community governance review may be triggered by a statutory petition or a formal 'application' in the terms of the 2007 Act, or the principal council may decide to undertake a review at any time, for example in response to population changes or new housing development, as part of a periodic programme of reviews or in response to a request from a town/parish council.
- 4.4 Section 93 of the 2007 Act allows principal councils to decide how to undertake a community governance review, provided that they comply with certain duties in that Act including the need to publish the terms of reference and any recommendations of the review and to ensure that any proposals reflect the identities and interests of the community in the area and promote effective and convenient local government.
- 4.5 In undertaking a review, the principal council must consult local electors and other interested parties including any other local authorities in the area under review and must follow guidance issued by the Secretary of State and the Local Government Boundary

Commission for England (LGBCE) ('the guidance'). The way the council consults is not prescribed but any representations received must be taken into account when finalising the recommendations of the review.

4.6 A community governance review begins when the principal council publishes terms of reference for the review and ends when it agrees the final recommendations and adopts a Community Governance Reorganisation Order giving effect to any changes in accordance with those recommendations.

4.7 In accordance with regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2000, functions relating to community governance reviews are not to be the responsibility of an authority's executive. The draft and final recommendations of the review must therefore be agreed by the Council or under delegated arrangements agreed by the Council.

5 Community governance review of the unparished area of Taunton and eight adjoining parishes

5.1 On 19 October 2021 an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council resolved to commence a community governance review of the unparished area of Taunton and eight surrounding parishes (Trull, Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove, Kingston St. Mary, Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton) with a view to the creation of a parish or parishes and council(s) to serve all or part of that area. The terms of reference for the community governance review were delegated to be approved by the Chief Executive Officer and Monitoring Officer or Deputy, after consultation with the Community Governance Review Working Group and the Leader of the Council, for later publication.

5.2 Officer delegations were also agreed in respect of any necessary minor amendments to the first stage consultation wording and communications and consultation plan for the community governance review, and to take such action as necessary to progress the community governance review and amend the timetable in accordance with legislation and the statutory guidance.

5.3 The Council's decision on 19 October 2021 followed previous resolutions of Taunton Deane Borough Council on 19 March 2018 that "a Community Governance Review of the Unparished Area of Taunton be commenced at the earliest opportunity (taking into consideration the guidance from both the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government)" and at the Somerset West and Taunton Council meeting on 30 March 2021 that "a Community Governance Review (CGR) of the Unparished Area of Taunton was commenced with a view to creating a new Town or Parish Council(s) from 1st April 2023" and to establish a cross-party Members Working Group to commence the community governance review and make recommendations to Full Council with in relation to the review.

5.4 Somerset County Council has previously indicated a wish to see a community governance review undertaken and within both unitary business cases there was the expectation that a town council would be created for Taunton to enable their proposals to work effectively, i.e.:

- One Somerset Business Case: "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”; and

- Stronger Somerset Business Case: “We recognise the need to establish a Town Council for Taunton and commit to delivering this as part of our ongoing relationship with communities”.

6 Progress to date

- 6.1 The review began on 12 November 2021 with the publication of terms of reference setting out the aims, process and timetable, the matters on which the review would focus and policies that the Council considers relevant. On 17th November 2021 the Council commenced the first period of public consultation until 12 January 2022, during which local residents and all interested parties were invited to make initial submissions on whether a parish/town council or councils should be established for Taunton and if so what area it/they should cover; any consequential changes to the eight adjoining parishes included in the review and related matters; and any other points that they feel should be considered.
- 6.2 For the first stage consultation period to 12 January 2022, a range of channels were used to publicise the review and invite electors and others to respond including:
- Notification to the relevant parish councils (including individual letters and a promotional message in the SWT Parish Newsletter) and to Somerset County Council, Somerset Association of Local Councils and the Taunton Charter Trustees;
 - Notification to elected representatives including district ward and county division councillors for the areas under review;
 - Information to businesses and local voluntary and community groups based in the areas under review;
 - A dedicated page for the review on the Council website with an online form for responses and periodic links from the home page;
 - Press releases and social media posts;
 - Paper-based consultation questionnaires available on request;
 - Face-to-face; and
 - Attendance by officers and members of the Working Group at the Town and Parish Conference (November 2021) and at a number of parish council/charter trustee meetings.
- 6.3 Responses were accepted by post, e-mail or via the online form.
- 6.4 After the close of the first stage consultation, the submissions received were reported to the Community Governance Review Working Group and considered at meetings of that Working Group on 26 January and 1, 10 and 15 February 2022.
- 6.5 Following its consideration of the responses received in the context of the criteria for the review, the Working Group has agreed its preferred option for the draft recommendations of the community governance review and these are now presented to the Council for adoption as the basis of a further round of public consultation.

7 Responses to the first stage consultation - summary

- 7.1 A total of 229 responses were received to the first stage consultation. Of these 201

respondents completed the online consultation proforma, including 191 local residents and smaller numbers of local employees, business persons and representatives of community organisations.

- 7.2 Based on postcode information provided by the online respondents, at least 173 responses came from residents of, or persons connected with, the area under review. The largest single group (59) were from the currently unparished area but responses were received from residents of all parishes under review as well as from elsewhere in the district.
- 7.3 In addition to the online respondents, 16 further individuals submitted separate responses by email. Written responses were also received from seven of the eight parish councils within the review area, from Creech St Michael Parish Council and from Somerset County Council, the Somerset Association of Local Councils, the Charter Trustees for Taunton and Victoria Park Action Group.
- 7.4 All of the responses received to the first stage consultation are set out in the consultation report at Appendix D to this report.
- 7.5 Information on the specific responses received to each question in the first stage consultation and the substantive issues raised by respondents from and in respect of each of the individual areas included in the review are set out in the 'Considerations' paragraphs at section 9 of this report below.
- 7.6 The Council will note that a number of the parish councils within the review area also conducted their own surveys of local residents on the matters to be considered by the review and provided the results of these surveys in their responses. The Working Group agreed that these surveys should be considered alongside the formal responses to the council's own consultation and the relevant information is included in section 9 below.

8 Criteria for making recommendations

- 8.1 Section 93 of the 2007 Act requires principal councils to ensure that community governance within the area under review will be:
- reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and
 - effective and convenient
- 8.2 The guidance states that when considering these criteria, councils should take into account factors including the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion; and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish. The guidance further states that 'the general rule should be that the parish is based on an area which reflects community identity and interest, and which is of a size which is viable as an administrative unit of local government'.

Community identities/interests and boundaries

- 8.3 In accordance with the above principles, the Council has set out policies in the terms of reference for the review including the following:

- “The Council notes the Government’s continued commitment to town and parish councils and its guidance that it ‘expects to see a trend in the creation, rather than the abolition, of parishes” (para 6.2);
- “It is important that the creation of any parish(es) should reflect distinctive and recognisable communities of interest, with their own sense of identity and that electors should be able to identify clearly with the parish in which they are resident. This information will therefore need to be gathered as part of the review.” (para 6.3);
- “The Council will wish to balance carefully the consideration of changes that have happened over time, for example through population shifts or additional development and that may have led to a different community identity, with historic traditions in the area.” (para 6.4); and
- “The Council notes that the boundaries between parishes will often reflect the ‘no-man’s land’ between communities represented by areas of low population or pronounced physical barriers, either natural or man-made; and that ideally boundaries should be, and be likely to remain, easily identifiable.” (para 6.6)

Effective and convenient community governance

- 8.4 The guidance states: ‘With local parish and town councils in mind, effective and convenient local government essentially means that such councils should be viable in terms of providing at least some local services, and if they are to be convenient, they need to be easy to reach and accessible to local people’.
- 8.5 In relation to viability, the Council has set out the following policy in the terms of reference for the review:
- “The Council wishes to ensure that parishes should be viable as an administrative unit and should possess a precept that enables them effectively to promote the well-being of their residents and contribute to the provision of services in their area in an economic and efficient manner. Nevertheless, it is recognised that in a rural area a strong sense of community can prevail over a sparsely populated area” (para 6.5).

Electoral arrangements

- 8.6 Once the Council has determined whether it will recommend any changes to parish boundaries or councils, it must go on to consider the electoral arrangements for those councils. This includes:
- The ordinary year of elections for the parish council. The Council may decide that the first elections to a new parish council shall take place in a year other than the ordinary year of elections.
 - Warding: The Council must consider whether a parish should be, or should continue to be, divided into wards for the purposes of elections to the parish council and the number and boundaries of parish wards, taking account of population distribution and community identity and interests in the area.

- The number of councillors: The Council must consider the number of councillors to be elected for each parish/ward and the number of electors they represent. In so doing the Council will, as required by the 2007 Act, have regard to the current number of electors; and any change in that number which is likely to occur in the next five years. The Council should also have regard to existing levels of representation, the pattern of existing council sizes which have stood the test of time and the take-up of seats at elections. There is no duty to ensure electoral equality between parishes or wards, but the LGBCE believes it is not in the interests of effective and convenient local government, either for voters or councillors, to have significant differences in representation.

9 CONSIDERATIONS AND THE WORKING GROUP'S PREFERRED OPTION

9.1 The first stage consultation responses were considered by the Community Governance Review Working Group on 26 January and 1, 10 and 15 February 2022. The Working Group considered the responses in the context of the criteria for the review, assessed a number of possible options and agreed their preferred option for draft recommendations of the review, to be subject to a second round of public consultation before any final decisions are taken. Full details of all responses received during the first stage consultation, including the full text of each parish council's response, are included in Appendix D to this report.

(a) A parish/town council for Taunton

- 9.2 In relation to the question of whether a parish or parishes should be created to cover the currently unparished area of Taunton, the Working Group noted that there was widespread support for this from amongst the consultation respondents, with over 83% answering 'yes' to the question "Should a town or parish council or councils be set up to serve the parts of Taunton that do not currently have them (the 'unparished areas')?"
- 9.3 The Working Group considered that such an action would address the historic anomaly of this part of Taunton being, since at least the reorganisation of local government in England in 1974, the only unparished area in Somerset and that the establishment of a parish/town council would enable the residents of Taunton to be properly represented alongside other areas in negotiations with the new unitary authority on any devolution framework plans.
- 9.4 The Working Group further noted that a majority of the consultation responses (over 66%) favoured a single parish to cover the whole of the unparished area, rather than separate council(s) for any area(s) within it, and members agreed that this would both reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area and promote effective and convenient local government.
- 9.5 Section 94 of the 2007 Act provides that where a council creates a new parish, if that parish has 1,000 or more local government electors the principal council must also recommend that a parish council be created to serve the new parish.
- 9.6 Subject to further considerations as set out below on the precise boundaries for the new parish, **the Working Group therefore resolved to recommend that a single parish be created to serve as a minimum the currently unparished areas of Taunton, that the new parish be named 'Taunton' and that a parish council be established to**

serve the new parish with effect from 1 April 2023.

(b) Other forms of community governance as an alternative to a parish/town council

- 9.7 The 2007 Act requires a principal council in undertaking a community governance review to give consideration to other (non-parish) forms of community governance that have been made, or could be made, for the purpose of community representation or engagement in the area under review. The guidance states that these should be considered as alternatives to, or stages towards, the establishment of parish councils.
- 9.8 Only just over 8% of respondents to the first stage consultation agreed that such forms of community governance should be considered as alternatives to the establishment of a parish/town council and it is suggested that there is no compelling evidence for such a proposition in relation to Taunton, especially as the guidance further states that 'what sets parish councils apart from other kinds of governance is the fact they are a democratically elected tier of local government, independent of other council tiers and budgets, and possess specific powers' and that 'their directly elected parish councillors represent local communities in a way that other bodies, however worthy, cannot since such organisations do not have representatives directly elected to those bodies'.

(c) The boundaries of a new Taunton Parish

- 9.9 On the question of whether the new parish should extend beyond the unparished area to also take in any part(s) of the surrounding parish(es), the consultation responses were more mixed. Overall, just over 55% of respondents to the first stage consultation stated that any new parish/town council for Taunton should be confined to the currently unparished area. However, the Working Group noted that there were varying views on this matter on the part of respondents from different geographical areas, and that the guidance required that consideration be given to the statutory criteria of community identities and interests and effective and convenient local government as they applied to each of the communities within the area under review.
- 9.10 The Working Group noted that there were a number of areas of existing parishes where development had taken place or was imminent adjacent to the unparished area, in some cases forming a continuous urban area with the town of Taunton, which was therefore in reality no longer coterminous with the historic boundary of the unparished area. As a result it was possible that some of the existing parish boundaries no longer met the criteria in the guidance, or that the development described had had an impact on how residents in those areas see themselves, i.e. whether they identified as residents of Taunton or another parish, where they used amenities during their day-to-day lives and/or whether they would be likely to utilise the services provided by a parish/town council.
- 9.11 The Working Group therefore agreed to look in turn at the boundary of the currently unparished area with each adjoining parish in the context of the statutory criteria and consider in each case whether any changes to the parish boundary should be recommended and if so, any consequential changes to adjoining parishes that might be required.

(d) Viability of any amended parish area(s)

- 9.12 In relation to this latter point, the Working Group noted that over 56% of respondents to the first stage consultation had stated that in the event that a new parish/town council for Taunton taking in both the unparished area and the urban parts of one or more surrounding parishes, they would support the remaining (rural) parts of those parishes, if viable, remaining as individual, smaller parishes each with their own council.
- 9.13 The criterion of effective and convenient community governance is relevant here. The guidance states: ‘... [parish] councils should be viable in terms of providing at least some local services, and if they are to be convenient they need to be easy to reach and accessible to local people’.
- 9.14 Section 94 of the 2007 Act provides that where a council creates a new parish, if that parish has 150 or fewer electors the principal council may not recommend that a parish council be created. This threshold does not apply to existing parish councils – if a community governance review concludes that the existence of a parish council reflects community identities and provides effective and convenient local government, despite a small number of electors, then it can recommend that the parish council should stay in existence – but the question of viability must be considered.

(e) Norton Fitzwarren Parish

- 9.15 16 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of Norton Fitzwarren Parish. In addition Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council responded, advising that the Parish Council had voted unanimously on 1 December 2021 to reject the proposal that Norton Fitzwarren be included in any new Taunton Town Council area. The Parish Council stated in its response that ‘Norton Fitzwarren is three miles distant from Taunton and the present parish boundary follows the back stream which in turn follows Silk Mills Lane from Cross Keys roundabout to Netherclay Lane. On the western side of Silk Mills Lane is a rural green wedge which separates the parish of Norton Fitzwarren from Taunton and is an obvious boundary’.
- 9.16 The Parish Council also stated that it had undertaken an extensive consultation with residents and village organisations including postal and online surveys and face-to-face meetings, which it advised had shown that 98% of residents are in favour of retaining Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council and that the residents do not consider themselves, or wish, to be part of Taunton town.
- 9.17 Based on the feedback from the Parish Council and local residents, the Working Group considered that it was clear that the Parish of Norton Fitzwarren had a distinctive sense of place and the existing arrangements reflected the identities and interests of the community in that area. Therefore **the Working Group recommends the complete removal of the Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council area from further consideration of the review and its inclusion in any new Taunton Town Council.**

(f) West Monkton Parish

- 9.18 22 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of West Monkton Parish. In addition West Monkton Parish Council responded, expressing disappointment and dismay that the parish had been included in the community governance review, and making detailed points about the parish and its residents that the Parish Council feels demonstrate how the existing community

governance arrangements are reflective of the identifies and interests of the community, effective and convenient, enable community cohesion and reflect the size, population, and boundaries of the community.

- 9.19 The Parish Council stated that it had sent a survey to every household in the parish and that 492 responses were received. The Parish Council stated that these responses support its representations and in particular demonstrate that local residents make extensive use of local businesses and community facilities, identify with their home villages rather than Taunton, engage with the Parish Council and that over 93% of respondents wish to keep their parish council with its local representation.
- 9.20 Based on the feedback from the Parish Council and local residents, the Working Group considered that it was clear that the Parish of West Monkton had a distinctive sense of place and the existing arrangements reflected the identities and interests of the community in that area.
- 9.21 In relation to the Hankridge Retail Park, Creech Castle and the associated Toneway Road, the Working Group noted that this area was a key shopping area for the whole town due to its key location near the motorway junction. Members considered that the governance of this area would be more effective and convenient were it to be included in the proposed Town Council area, especially when considering the proximity of the Halcon Estate just on the west side of the Toneway which was part of the currently unparished area. In terms of sense of place, the Working Group considered that the Toneway was part of the town when travelling to or from the motorway. Therefore, **the Working Group recommends that the Hankridge Retail Park, Creech Castle and the associated Toneway Road, currently within West Monkton Parish, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish, which should run along the railway to the M5.**
- 9.22 With the exception of the above area however, taking into account the feedback from the Parish Council and local residents, **the Working Group recommends the exclusion of any further part of the West Monkton Parish Council area from further consideration of the review and its inclusion in any new Taunton Town Council.**

(g) Comeytrove Parish

- 9.23 20 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of Comeytrove Parish. In addition, Comeytrove Parish Council responded, stating that 'the Parish Council are open minded in principle to the concept of becoming part of the Town Council subject to further information becoming available in the second round of consultation.
- 9.24 The Working Group considered that the sense of place of those within Comeytrove as identified in the feedback and Parish Council response did not display strong feeling for local distinctiveness or local identity to the parish separate from Taunton. The Working Group noted that the guidance was clear that parish areas should "*reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. For example, over time, communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across them resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours*" (para 83).

9.25 Comeytrowe was considered a strong example of such an area and the new development of two thousand homes would strengthen this expansion and change the character of the area. Therefore, **the Working Group recommends the abolition of Comeytrowe Parish Council and the entire area of Comeytrowe Parish to be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.**

(h) Trull Parish

9.26 8 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of Trull Parish. A majority of these did not favour any proposed Taunton Parish/Town Council taking in any part of Trull Parish, but two respondents identified areas, namely that part of Killams that is currently within Trull Parish, and the Orchard Grove development, that may be better served by inclusion in a new parish/town council.

9.27 The Working Group considered that Trull Village and the majority of the existing parish area had a distinctive identity and sense of place separate from Taunton. In relation to the eastern tip of the Trull Parish area however, members felt that the area of Killams Green had no logical geographic connection or common sense of place with the village of Trull and in terms of community cohesion would be better grouped with the rest of the Killams area. Therefore, **the Working Group recommends that the Killams Green area, currently within Trull Parish Council area, should be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.**

9.28 In addition, further to the proposals above in relation to Comeytrowe, the Working Group considered whether the area of forthcoming development in the south-west corner of Taunton, spanning both Comeytrowe and Trull parishes, should be included in its entirety in the Taunton Parish/Town Council boundary.

9.29 The new development was considered to exacerbate the urban extension of the community in the Comeytrowe area and the Working Group considered that these residents, like those in Comeytrowe, would look to Taunton for carrying out their activities in the pattern of their daily life. Members received advice from the Planning Policy officers on the expected timescale of the completion of the development as well as its effect on the electoral arrangements on Trull Parish. The size, population and borders of this development would have a large impact on Trull Parish governance arrangements and community cohesion if left as is.

9.30 It was considered that including the area in a new Taunton Parish/Town Council area would reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. Therefore, **the Working Group recommends that the part of the forthcoming development in the south-west corner of Taunton that currently falls within Trull Parish should be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.**

9.31 The Working Group also considered whether a minor change should be made to the Trull Parish boundary to the north-west of Cotlake Hill. This currently follows the Sherford Stream up to Trull Village. Members felt that if instead the boundary were to follow the green wedge around the Sherford urban area, this would create a clearer delineation of the boundary between Taunton and Trull that better reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area in a more logical boundary. Therefore, **the Working Group recommends that the boundary of Trull Parish to the north-west**

of Cotlake Hill be altered to follow the green wedge around the Sherford urban area, with the small area to the south of that boundary that is currently within the unparished area of Taunton becoming part of Trull Parish.

(i) Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish

- 9.32 17 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish. In addition Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council responded, stating that it supports the view of the Somerset Association of Local Councils that any new Taunton Town Council should cover only the currently unparished area, and that the Parish Council wishes to remain separate from the Town Council and continue to represent the views of its rural residents.
- 9.33 The Parish Council also stated that it had carried out a survey of its residents with the December 2021 issue of the parish newsletter to which 116 responses were received and of these: over 99% wanted to keep the Parish Council with its local knowledge and representation; over 88% thought that any new Taunton Town Council should represent only the currently unparished centre of Taunton; only 7.8% thought that the area in which they live should be incorporated into a future Taunton Town Council; and only a small minority stated that they belong to and identify with Taunton town as opposed to one of the villages or neighbourhoods within Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish.
- 9.34 The Working Group considered that the rural parts of Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish had a distinctive identify and sense of place separate from Taunton.
- 9.35 Based on the criteria of sense of place however, members considered that the currently urban area of Nerrols Farm felt part of Taunton and in reflecting the identities and interests of these residents these areas should be included within the proposed Taunton Parish/Town Council area. The influence of development over the past twenty years in this particular area was another strong example whereby paragraph 83 of the guidance came into play with the urban growth of Taunton meaning that neighbours lived in different parishes. Absorbing this area into the proposed Taunton Parish/Town Council area would restore Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish back to its previous identity as a village parish.
- 9.36 The Working Group received advice from Planning Policy Officers on the detail and expected timescale of the completion of developments which would have an effect on Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish.
- 9.37 Based on these considerations, **the Working Group recommends the area covered by the Maidenbrook Ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council, including several sites earmarked for housing development in the near future, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.**

(j) Staplegrove Parish

- 9.38 3 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of Staplegrove Parish. In addition, Staplegrove Parish Council responded. The Parish Council referred to the major reorganisation of local government that is currently underway in Somerset and the proposed establishment of local community networks (LCNs) where councils can come together to deliver services efficiently, which

the Parish Council feels may be a more organic way of developing larger units and possibly leading to an enlarged Town Council. In the absence of any detailed information about these future structures the Parish Council stated that it 'would rather retain its present position as a separate Parish Council until the situation becomes clearer but would agree that council/s for the unparished area be formed so that there can be active representation and participation in the developing reorganisation'.

- 9.39 The Parish Council stated that in terms of area, Staplegrove is the second smallest of the peripheral parishes but unlike say Kingston St Mary which is totally rural, Staplegrove has multiple elements. It is physically divided by key roads which in some way define the parish but the parish cannot be clearly defined as urban or rural and the Parish Council feels it is inappropriate to suggest boundary changes which will also affect adjacent parishes at this time.
- 9.40 The Working Group noted that Staplegrove Parish included distinct urban and rural parts. In relation to the urban parts, including the forthcoming development in the north-west corner of Taunton, the Working Group considered that the feedback did not demonstrate a strong local distinctive character in this area and that considering all of the evidence the sense of place, identities and interests and for local government to remain effective and convenient, this area would be better reflected in being within the proposed Town Council boundary. The application of paragraph 83 of the guidance in terms of growth outside the boundary of the unparished area very much applied and this would be exacerbated by the new development of the urban growth.
- 9.41 The Working Group noted that a slim area to the west of Silk Mills Lane currently formed part of Staplegrove Parish. As part of the changes outlined it was proposed that this small area should be included within Norton Fitzwarren Parish.
- 9.42 In accordance with the above **the Working Group recommends the inclusion of the urban parts of Staplegrove Parish, including the entirety of the forthcoming development in the north-west corner of Taunton within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish; and the inclusion of the slim area of Staplegrove Parish jutting to the west side of Silk Mills Lane within the boundary of Norton Fitzwarren Parish.**
- 9.43 The Working Group recognised that the viability of Staplegrove Parish would be affected by this proposed boundary change. If it was considered necessary to merge the remaining area of Staplegrove with a neighbouring parish, the Working Group considered that a merger with Kingston St. Mary would be most appropriate, based on the more rural character of the remaining areas as opposed to the more urban Norton Fitzwarren settlement. Therefore, **the Working Group recommends that if the proposed changes bring about a remaining Staplegrove Parish area of fewer than 150 electors, that remaining area be merged with Kingston St. Mary Parish.**

(k) Kingston St Mary Parish

- 9.44 5 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of Kingston St Mary Parish. In addition, Kingston St Mary Parish Council responded, advising that the Parish Council held an extraordinary meeting on 24 November 2021 to consider the review. The meeting was attended by parish, district and county councillors and a large number of local residents.

- 9.45 The Parish Council stated that local residents in Kingston St Mary attach the highest importance to being separate from Taunton and presented evidence which it felt demonstrates that Kingston St Mary should remain a standalone parish and not be subsumed into a new Taunton Town Council. The land in the parish is used mainly for working farms and is partly within the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty, which is very different to the urban nature of Taunton. Arising from its rural environment and community facilities the Parish Council states that the vast majority of its residents have a strong affinity with Kingston St Mary and identify the parish as their home.
- 9.46 The Parish Council did however identify the forthcoming Staplegrove East development as of concern. Approximately 50% of the proposed 915 homes will occupy a small number of fields at the extreme south of Kingston St Mary Parish. The Parish Council stated that this development will be a more urban environment with its own educational, recreational and community facilities and that its residents are therefore unlikely to identify with Kingston St Mary's mainly rural community.
- 9.47 The Working Group considered that the rural nature of Kingston St Mary Parish – including the potential addition of the rural parts of Staplegrove Parish as proposed above - gave it a distinctive identity and sense of place and that therefore the parish and its council should remain a separate entity from Taunton.
- 9.48 In relation to the forthcoming Staplegrove East development, the Working Group agreed that the residents of this development were likely to identify more closely with Taunton than with Kingston St Mary. Based on the sense of place and to reflect the identities and interests of the area, and taking into account the Parish Council's concerns about the impact of this development on the cohesion and character of the Kingston St. Mary village, **the Working Group recommends that a small southern portion of the Kingston St. Mary Parish area, representing that part of the proposed Staplegrove East development that falls within the parish, be included within the boundary of the proposed new Taunton Parish.**

(I) Bishops Hull Parish

- 9.49 23 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of Bishops Hull Parish, 14 of whom considered that any new Taunton Parish/Town Council should be confined to the unparished area. In addition, Bishops Hull Parish Council responded, stating that 'the Parish Council fully supports a Town Council for Taunton to include the unparished areas. However, the Parish Council feels further information would be required to make an informed decision about the possibility of Bishops Hull being included within any new Town Council'.
- 9.50 The Working Group noted the proximity of the urban part of Bishops Hull Parish to the western boundary of the unparished area and discussed the possible inclusion of this area within the proposed Taunton Parish/Town Council area. Members heard evidence in relation to the services and amenities used by residents and the extent to which they identified with either Bishops Hull and/or Taunton.
- 9.51 The Working Group noted that the Silk Mills Road ran from north to south through the urban part of Bishops Hull and would represent a clear and easily recognised boundary. However, members considered that this would not reflect the identity of the area as a

whole and may divide rather than bring together the community. The splitting of the parish was therefore disregarded as an option.

- 9.52 Having agreed that the urban part of Bishops Hull should not be divided between two parishes, members considered that there was an arguable case both for the whole of that area to become part of a new Taunton Parish and for it to remain separate. On balance the Working Group considered that the community interests and identity of the area would be better served by the whole of Bishops Hull remaining as a separate parish.
- 9.53 It was considered that the area south of Wellington Road (Galmington Trading Estate) had no sense of identification with Bishops Hull, but that in relation to a small triangle in the unparished area at the cross-section with Wellington Road and the current unparished area boundary, residents did feel part of Bishops Hull and not Taunton and the triangle was part of the electoral ward/county division so including it in Bishops Hull Parish would align with other electoral arrangements which had developed.
- 9.54 In view of the above considerations **the Working Group recommends that with the exception of Galmington Trading Estate and a small section south of the A38 near Rumwell, no part of Bishops Hull Parish should become part of the proposed new Taunton Parish, and that the small triangular residential area at the cross-section with Wellington Road, currently within the unparished area, should become part of Bishops Hull Parish.**

(m) The unparished area of Taunton

- 9.55 59 individual responses were received from respondents identifying themselves as residents of the currently unparished area of Taunton, a significant majority of whom supported the establishment of a parish in Taunton and the creation of a single parish/town council to serve it.
- 9.56 The Charter Trustees for Taunton resolved to respond to the first stage consultation on the community governance review, stating 'we believe that a single Town Council should be set up to cover at least the whole of the currently unparished area of Taunton'.
- 9.57 The Council will note that if an outcome of the review is that the whole of the unparished area becomes parished, in accordance with the Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) Regulations 2008 the Charter Trustees for Taunton will be dissolved as a body and their rights and responsibilities will be transferred to the new council.

(n) Ancillary inter-parish issues

- 9.58 Arising from discussion of the substantive issues regarding the boundaries of any proposed new Taunton Parish, the Working Group also identified a small number of ancillary inter-parish boundary matters that felt should be considered:
- It was highlighted that the current boundary between Norton Fitzwarren and Bishops Hull parishes just north of Mill Cottages did not follow the logical boundary of the railway line but instead a meandering line that extended over each side at different points. **The Working Group recommends that this should be corrected.**

- It was noted that the current boundary between West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine parishes between Maidenbrook and Yallands Hill currently followed what was felt to be an anomalous zigzag south of the Country Park. **The Working Group recommends that further consideration be given to amending this boundary, for example by following the A3259 westwards to Maidenbrook Lane, in the light of any comments from the respective parish councils.**

(o) Electoral arrangements

- 9.59 For any parish/town council newly established or changed by a community governance review, the principal council must consider the electoral arrangements to apply to that council. There are three main elements to electoral arrangements in this context – the ordinary year of elections, council size (i.e. the number of parish/town councillors) and the warding (if any) within the parish council area.
- 9.60 In relation to the ordinary year of elections, any new parish/town council would be subject to the normal cycle of parish elections within Somerset which, after the May 2022 polls, are scheduled to take place in May 2027 and every four years thereafter. However, Section 98(6) of the 2007 Act empowers a principal council in its Reorganisation Order to exclude or modify the application of (inter alia) section 16(3) of the Local Government Act 1972 Act to enable the first elections to a parish council to be held in an earlier year. **The Working Group recommends that the first elections to the proposed new parish/town council for Taunton should be held on the ordinary day of elections (the first Thursday in May) of 2023.**

(p) Electorate projections

- 9.61 When making proposals for the warding (if any) within a parish/town council area, the number of councillors to be elected for each parish/ward and the number of electors they each represent, the Council must have regard to the current number of electors; and any change in that number which is likely to occur in the next five years.
- 9.62 The relevant electorate figures and projections for each of the parish areas that would be established in accordance with the Working Group's recommendations are as follows:

Parish	Electorate February 2022	Projected Electorate 2027
Taunton (new)	37,700	41,600
Bishops Hull (amended)	2,839	3,000
Cheddon Fitzpaine (amended)	319	309
Kingston St. Mary (amended)	730	750
Norton Fitzwarren (as existing)	2,804	2,912
Staplegrove (amended)	1,590	<150 tbc
Trull (amended)	1,828	1,666
West Monkton (amended)	4,190	4,400

(q) Council size

- 9.63 In relation to the number of parish/town councillors to be elected to the new and altered councils, the Working Group noted that the Local Government Act 1972 specifies that

each parish council must have at least five councillors. There is no maximum number, no requirement in legislation that the number of councillors should be proportional to electorate size and no legislative guidance on the ideal number of parish councillors.

- 9.64 In considering the issue of council size, the statutory guidance states that the LGBCE is of the view that “each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities. Nevertheless, having regard to the current powers of parish councils, [the principal council] should consider the broad pattern of existing council sizes. This pattern appears to have stood the test of time and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to have provided for effective and convenient local government. Principal councils should also bear in mind that the conduct of parish council business does not usually require a large body of councillors. [...]”
- 9.65 The statutory guidance goes on to state: “In addition, historically many parish councils, particularly smaller ones, have found difficulty in attracting sufficient candidates to stand for election. This has led to uncontested elections and/or a need to co-opt members in order to fill vacancies. However, a parish council’s budget and planned or actual level of service provision may also be important factors in reaching conclusions on council size.”
- 9.66 It should be noted that in relation to any existing and continuing parish council whose area is reduced, any proposed change to the number of parish councillors would take effect from the next ordinary elections, i.e. May 2027, as the Local Government (Parishes and Parish Councils) Regulations 2008 provide that “any person in office immediately before the order date as a parish councillor for an area which is altered by the order (“an altered area”) shall, unless he resigns his office or it otherwise becomes vacant, continue as parish councillor for the area as so altered until the date on which he would ordinarily have retired had the order not been made” (para 10).
- 9.67 Although there is no statutory guidance on the number of parish councillors to be allocated, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has published recommendations on the matter. NALC Circular 1126 (1988) recommends that a council of no more than the legal minimum of five members is inconveniently small and it considered that the practical minimum should be seven. The NALC recommended the following allocations for parishes of different size electorates:

Electors	Councillors	Electors	Councillors	Electors	Councillors
Up to 900	7	4,401 – 5,400	13	11,901 – 13,500	19
901 – 1,400	8	5,401 – 6,500	14	13,501 – 15,200	20
1,401 – 2,000	9	6,501 – 7,700	15	15,201 – 17,000	21
2,001 – 2,700	10	7,701 – 9,000	16	17,001 – 18,900	22
2,701 – 3,500	11	9,001 – 10,400	17	18,901 – 20,900	23
3,501 – 4,400	12	10,401 – 11,900	18	20,901 – 23,000	24
				Over 23,000	25

9.68 The Aston Business School also conducted research that was published in 1992 which showed the then levels of representation as follows:

Electors	Councillors	Electors	Councillors
Up to 500	5-8	10,001 – 20,000	13-27
501 – 2,500	6-12	Over 20,000	13-31
2,501 – 10,000	9-16		

9.69 On the basis of the information above **the Working Group considers that if its recommendations for the boundary of the new Taunton Parish are agreed, the town/parish council established to serve that parish should have a council size of at least 20 councillors, with the final number to be determined in the context of the proposals to be developed in connection with warding arrangements within the new parish.**

9.70 **In relation to the other continuing parishes within the area under review, the Working Group does not consider that any change in council size is required.** Although the proposals would see the electorate of Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish reduced substantially, that Parish Council currently has six councillors which is only one more than the statutory minimum.

(r) Warding arrangements

9.71 Regarding whether a parish should be or should continue to be divided into wards, the 2007 Act requires the Council to consider:

- a) Whether the number, or distribution of the local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- b) Whether it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented.

9.72 In relation to the proposed new Taunton Parish the Working Group considered that, subject to consideration in the second stage of consultation, the size of the parish area and electorate, the number of parish councillors likely to be required to serve that electorate and the distinct character of communities in the different parts of Taunton meant that a single election for the whole parish would be impracticable and undesirable.

9.73 Therefore, **the Working Group recommends that the proposed new Taunton Parish should be warded and that draft proposals for the warding arrangements, and those of any other warded parishes in the area under review, be developed for inclusion in the second stage of consultation.**

10 The next stages of the review

10.1 Once the Council has agreed the draft recommendations of the community governance review, these will be subject to a further period of public consultation. The responses to this second stage consultation will be considered by the Community Governance Review Working Group and the Council before any decisions are made on whether or not to confirm the draft recommendations, either as drafted or amended in the light of the

consultation.

- 10.2 If the Council chooses to accept the final recommendations of the Review, concluded after public consultation, and if those recommendations include changes to governance arrangements, then it must make a reorganisation order and publish this together with the reasons for the changes, making maps available for public inspection,
- 10.3 Further to the draft recommendations set out in this report, there are a number of other matters that will need to be determined prior to the making of any reorganisation order. Decisions on these matters are not required at the current meeting but further consideration is proposed as follows:

(a) Further matters for consideration by the Working Group prior to the launch of the second stage consultation:

- Detailed draft recommendations for the warding arrangements of the proposed new Taunton Parish and those of any other warded parishes in the area under review;
- Indicative information on the services that could be provided by a new Taunton Town/Parish Council in its first year of operation and the precept required to fund these – this will require liaison with the new Somerset Council as part of the ongoing local government reorganisation process; and
- The constitution of the Community Governance Review Working Group going forward, in particular to ensure engagement of those councillors elected to the new Somerset Council in May 2022 whose divisions include any part of the area under review.

(b) Further matters to be resolved prior to the adoption of any reorganisation order:

- Any assets to be transferred to the new Taunton Parish/Town Council on vesting day from SWTC, Somerset Council or other parishes, and the maximum budget and precept figure for the council in its first year of operation (2023/24);
- The communications campaign required to inform those residents affected of the outcomes of the community governance review;
- Consequential and transitional arrangements including recommendations as to persons to serve as temporary parish/town councillors for Taunton from the proposed vesting day on 1 April 2023 until the first elections to the new council on 4 May 2023.

- 10.4 The Working Group has also sought further information on the effect of any changes to parish boundaries on the allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds. Although not a material consideration in the development of the review recommendations, it is felt that respondents to the second stage consultation may wish to be aware of this and officers are therefore seeking legal advice on the matter.

11 Proposed timetable for the remainder of the review

- 11.1 The indicative timetable for the review agreed following the October 2021 Council meeting envisaged the second stage consultation starting on 14 February 2022 and concluding on 25 March 2022, with the final recommendations being agreed at a Council meeting in April or May 2022. This timetable reflected the desirability of completing the

review without delay in order to avoid any clash with a possible boundary review of the new Somerset Council ahead of elections to that authority in May 2023.

- 11.2 Since that time however there have been a number of developments. Firstly the draft Structural Change Order shared by the Secretary of State states that the first elections to the new Somerset Council will be held on 5 May 2022 and that the parish elections in Somerset due in May 2023 will also be brought forward to that date, for Councils currently in existence (new authorities of which this proposal, if given effect it will be, will still be able to proceed with elections in 2023). Secondly the LGBCE has confirmed that it is not proposing to undertake a boundary review of the new authority prior to May 2023. Finally, the Returning Officer is proposing that the Notice of Election for the 5 May 2022 polls will be published on 21 March 2022, meaning that the pre-election period (sometimes known as ‘purdah’), during which particular restrictions apply to material that the Council may publish, will also start on that date.
- 11.3 In order to avoid any risks arising from the second stage consultation running into the pre-election period whilst still allowing that consultation to extend for a sufficient period to allow all interested parties to have their say, it is proposed that the timetable for the remainder of the review should be amended as follows. This will still enable the review to be completed within 12 months of its commencement in accordance with the guidance and allow the outcomes of the review to be reflected in the revised register of electors on 1 December 2022 and taken into account in the council tax base calculations for the financial year 2023/24.

Council meeting to agree draft recommendations of the review for publication	3 March 2022
Working Group & Council meeting (if necessary) to consider the matters at 10.3 (a) above and agree the final content and arrangements for the second stage consultation	April/May 2022
Launch of second stage consultation	June 2022
Conclusion of second stage consultation	July 2022
Working Group meeting to consider responses to second stage consultation and make recommendations to the Council	August 2022
Council to agree final recommendations of the community governance review and consider any draft re-organisation order and its approval process which gives effect to the recommendations of the review (subject to the Statutory transitional arrangements and decision making framework therein.)	September 2022
Approval and publication of re-organisation order	October 2022

12 Consequential matters

- 12.1 Where a reorganisation order includes significant changes to parish boundaries, the order may cover consequential matters that appear to the Council to be necessary or proper to give effect to the order. These may include the transfer and management or custody of property, the setting of precepts for new parishes, provision with respect to the transfer of any functions, property, rights and liabilities and/or provision for the transfer of staff, compensation for loss of office, pensions and other staffing matters. In

these matters, the Council will be guided by relevant regulations issued under the 2007 Act, by any ongoing discussions regarding devolution with the new Somerset Council and by the views of local residents.

- 12.2 In this regard, the first stage consultation included the following question: “Do you think town or parish council(s) should consider delivering some local services that are currently provided by Somerset West and Taunton Council and for these to be paid for by the town council precept?” 51.74% of respondents answered ‘yes’ to this question and 42.79% ‘no’, with 5.47% not answering.

13 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 13.1 This is a key project for 2021 within the Internal Operations Directorate Plan and links to the Corporate Strategy.

14 Finance / Resource Implications

- 14.1 In the Full Council meeting on 19th October 2021 it was agreed to adopt option 2c which was *‘To commence a Community Governance Review of the Unparished Area of Taunton and the adjoining Parish areas with the intention to implement a town council for all or part of that area’* as determined in paragraphs a) to e) of the minutes.
- 14.2 In the report of 19th October, the costs related to Option 2b were estimated will require additional resource for a further widening of the consultation process and it is estimated that the total costs would be up to £50,000. It is estimated the costs of Option 2c are similar.
- 14.3 These costs are currently being met from within the Internal Operations budget.
- 14.4 It should also be noted that should a stand-alone election be required in May 2023 this is estimated at being £13,500.
- 14.5 The revision of the boundaries will require the Civica billing system be updated, as the most efficient implementation. The purchase and implementation of a bulk parish change module is estimated to cost £35,000 (plus existing staff time), plus an £5k annual licence fee going forward.
- 14.6 Other costs envisaged include additional temporary Geographical Information System and Customer Services staff resources to cover peak workload totalling £22,000.

Summary of Initial Estimated Costs of Implementation

	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	Total £
Resources for Consultation	22,200	27,800		50,000
Software Upgrade		35,000		35,000
Software Maintenance		5,000	5,000	10,000
GIS Support uplift		16,000		16,000
Customer Services capacity uplift		6,000		6,000
Election Costs			13,500	13,500
Totals	22,200	89,900	18,500	130,500

14.7 Costs of up to £50,000 are planned to be covered from within the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Internal Operations Budget. An additional £62,000 is required in 2022/23, which officers plan to manage within existing budget but may need the Director of Internal Operations to exercise delegated authority for a small allocation from General Reserves if necessary.

Precept and Budget Setting

14.8 The regulatory framework for setting the first year budget and precept for a new town council was set out on the previous report to members at the Special Council meeting on 19th October 2021.

14.9 The potential level of expenditure for a new town council will be affected by the area and population it serves therefore a key dependency in the costing work involved is the agreement of the boundaries. It will also need to take into account the transfer of any services from SWTC to the town council plus any services currently provided by existing parish councils in the areas that may be affected by the outcome of this Governance Review.

14.10 It will be important to provide the public with an indication of costs as part of the next phase of consultation. Preparation for this will be aided by the resolution of Council in relation to this report.

14.11 Legislation requires that the following will transfer to a new town council:

- allotments
- all property, rights and liabilities of the Charter Trustees

14.12 Officers will continue to work with the members of the Working Group in the coming weeks to develop an indicative range of budget and precept that may be determined for a new town council, so that this can be included in the second stage consultation.

14.13 Councillors will need to determine at future meetings what assets, rights and liabilities are proposed to transfer to the new Taunton Town Council, and what the intended operational arrangements are. These may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Setting the precept for the 2023/24 financial year.
- b) Determine, in consultation with the new unitary authority, if any additional services and assets, rights and liabilities will transfer to the town council.
- c) Defining the process by which the assets, liabilities, and services are identified.

14.14 Final decisions on the Budget and Precept for 2023/24 would need to be made and included in the Reorganisation Order at the Council meeting in October 2022.

Background Information – Current Precepts

	2022/23 Tax Base (Band D Equivalent)	2022/23 Precept £	2022/23 Band D Rate £
Taunton Unparished Area Special Expenses raised by SWTC	15,255.85	29,093	1.93

	2022/23 Tax Base (Band D Equivalents)	2022/23 Precept £	2022/23 Band D Rate £
Taunton Charter Trustees	15,255.85	58,722	3.85
Total 'parish' council tax currently raised in the unparished area	15,255.85	87,815	5.78
Parishes Considered within the Community Governance Review:			
Bishops Hull	1,213.94	35,400	29.16
Cheddon Fitzpaine	909.06	37,247	40.97
Comeytrove	1,990.73	24,000	12.06
Kingston St Mary	431.98	12,385	28.67
Staplegrove	788.77	12,910	16.37
Trull	1,087.58	31,000	28.50
West Monkton	2,126.44	64,517	30.34
Selected other Town Councils:			
Minehead	4,238.04	753,261	177.74
Watchet	1,236.03	192,980	156.13
Wellington	5,376.16	413,677	76.95

15 Legal Implications

- 15.1 The Community Governance Review is being conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and statutory guidance issued in 2010 by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- 15.2 The processes associated with undertaking a Community Governance Review are prescribed by the above statute and guidance. The relevant legal provisions and implications are set out in the body of the report.

16 Partnership Implications

- 16.1 Appropriate consultation has taken place with local councils and others as part of the community governance review process as set out in the Communications and Consultation Plan and this will continue. Discussions with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Somerset County Council have taken place since July 2021.

17 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 17.1 Effective and convenient community governance arrangements can contribute to the promotion of improved health and wellbeing for communities.

18 Asset Management Implications

- 18.1 The Council report in September 2022 and any draft reorganisation order presented for

adoption will include details of any assets proposed for transfer to a new Taunton Parish/Town Council.

19 Data Protection Implications

19.1 The Council will comply with GDPR in respect of the Consultation and Communications Plan.

20 Consultation Implications

20.1 Appropriate consultation has taken place with local electors, business, community and voluntary sector, local Councils and others as part of the Community Governance Review process as described in the main body of the report.

Democratic Path:

- **Corporate / Community Scrutiny Committee – No**
- **Executive – No**
- **Full Council – Yes (3 March 2022)**

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

List of Appendices (background papers to the report)

Appendix A	Map illustrating the Working Group's proposals
Appendix B	Decision sheets setting out the Working Group's considerations and proposals for each of the areas under review
Appendix C	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix D	Full report on responses received to first stage consultation

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