

## **Divisions Affected – CHALGROVE AND WATLINGTON**

### **FULL COUNCIL MEETING**

**ON 5 APRIL 2022**

### **REPORT REGARDING FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE CHARLOTTE COXE TRUST**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**Council is RECOMMENDED to**

1. Establish a Committee of Council to which responsibility for all decision making in connection with the Charlotte Coxe Trust is delegated, which is to be known as the “Charlotte Coxe Trust Committee”.
2. Appoint the five members to the Committee.

#### **Executive Summary**

3. The Charlotte Coxe Trust is currently managed by the Director of Law and Governance on her own on behalf of the Council under 6.4(e) of the Scheme of Delegation (“acting as trustee on behalf of the Council in respect of any matter whereon he/she considers such action to be appropriate”). This arrangement is considered unsatisfactory for various reasons (detailed below) and creating the Committee resolves this.

#### **Background to the Charlotte Coxe Trust**

4. Since 1949, the Council has managed land and money “for the benefit of the inhabitants of Watlington” that was given to it by Laura Charlotte Coxe. The Charlotte Coxe Trust is a registered charity and the Charity assets comprise cash funds (currently around £80,000) and freehold land at 33/35 High Street, Watlington. 33 High Street is a vacant two storey house, which has been empty for some years and 35 High Street has Watlington Library on its ground floor.
5. The Council’s library service is the tenant of the Library.
6. The Director of Law and Governance in her trust management role is currently working closely with members of the community and Watlington Parish Council to bring 33 High Street back into use for the community.
7. The Committee, were it to assume this role in exercising the decisions in relation to the Trust, will need to consider the following:  
(a) whether trusteeship should be transferred by the Council to an external body such as Watlington Parish Council;

- (b) what should be done regarding 33 High Street in the short and long terms; and
- (c) what terms should be incorporated in the lease of the Watlington Library (having taken professional advice).

## Current governance arrangements

8. Currently the Director of Law and Governance has de facto responsibility for “running” the Trust for the Council, although there is no written definition of those responsibilities.
9. The Director of Law and Governance recently sought external advice on this and was advised that such an arrangement was not “fit for purpose” as:
  - (a) there is vagueness over the extent of her responsibilities;
  - (b) there is no accountability or transparency;
  - (c) there is no duty to debate and discuss; and
  - (d) she is exposed to allegations of conflict of interest.
10. To address the concerns detailed above, it is recommended that a new Committee is established as set out below. It is envisaged that the Member for Chalgrove and Watlington would be a member of the committee, but in doing so, in common with all members of the committee, they would need to be alert to any potential conflicts of interest between Watlington as a whole and the interests of the Trust.

## The new Committee

It is recommended

- 11.1 That the remit of the Committee is (inter alia) to:
  - (a) consider the options for the future management of the Trust and decide which should be implemented and then instruct officers to implement them; and
  - (b) make operational decisions on behalf of the Trust (in particular over the management of 33 High Street and the Watlington Library lease).
- 11.2 That the Committee has 5 members and is politically proportional, making decisions by majority voting and with a quorum of 3.
- 11.3 That the Committee elects a chair from its members.
- 11.4 That the Committee membership is established. It is proposed that there are a total of 5 seats on the Committee. Apportioning political balance translates to the following numbers of seats per political group

Committee Name	Frequency of Meetings	Number of Places	Nominations
Charlotte Coxé Trust Committee	Ad hoc	(2) – Liberal Democrat / Green Alliance (2) – Conservative / Independent Alliance (1) – Labour and Cooperative	To be confirmed by Group Leaders and reported to the Council Meeting

## Financial Implications

12. Trust building assets are held separately from the Council's own. Cash is currently held as an identifiable part of the Council's overall cash balance. There are no immediate financial implications for the Council. This is likely to change depending on the future course of action decided upon, but these could be met from existing charitable funds.

## Legal Implications

13. Setting up a statutory committee of the type proposed is within the Council's statutory powers and is consistent with the provisions of the Trust documents.

Comments checked by:

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## Staff Implications

14. A new Committee will add to the work of the Council's Committee Services Team.
15. If the Committee was to decide to transfer trusteeship to a third party it is possible that its work might be substantially completed within a year and therefore any additional work burden would not be permanent.

## Anita Bradley, Director of Law and Governance

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

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