

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 30 January 2023

Title: Annual Town Meeting

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk – Adam Clapton

Background

The Annual Town Meeting, the holding of which is a statutory requirement, is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 15 March 2023. This is not a Town Council meeting but is administered by it as the parish council.

The format of this meeting usually remains the same, due to the fact that it is principally a meeting for local electors to meet any Councillors who may be present to discuss parish/town affairs.

In an election year, following the Covid-19 pandemic, it is anticipated a higher number of residents will attend the meeting.

It should however be noted, this is not a political meeting nor an opportunity for debate or canvassing by electoral candidates or political party members; only electors of the parish are permitted to speak/ask questions during the meeting.

Current Situation

Officers held a meeting New layout and seating in the Corn Exchange. The Council has two options now the retractable seating has been added:

1. To have the seating out as an auditorium event with Councillors and participants on the stage (capacity 135)
2. To have the seating retracted, apart from the bottom two rows, with large round tables in front running towards the back of the Hall (Capacity 80-90)

The second option is broadly along the lines of the most recent meetings so is the one discussed by Officers (however, the other could be discussed). It offers a more inclusive feel for the electorate and gives the opportunity to be more informal, particularly during Q&A sessions with Members at the end of the meeting.

The details of the meeting are as follows:

- It is a statutory requirement to advertise the meeting in a local newspaper. The advert invites questions to be submitted to the Town Clerk ahead of the meeting.
- The meeting is Chaired by The Mayor, who has the Leader sat near to them providing a welcome, presenting their report and welcoming questions on all matters from the public

- Each Chair & The Mayor need to write a report about the work undertaken by their committee during the last year,. The meeting falls outside of the pre-election 'purdah' period so Chairs presenting reports do not need to worry if they are reporting on the work of the town council.
- There is an official agenda, copies are prepared for the public and usually put on a table at the front of the hall and this would include the Chairs' reports.
- Witney Ward members from WODC/OCC are invited but do not take part in the formal part of the meeting.
- Thames Valley Police are invited to attend and usually present a verbal report and answer questions.
- Round Tables are designated as 'Committee tables' which Chairs sit at and meet residents at after the main part of the meeting so they may discuss items relating to that committee.
- There will be the need for several members of staff to be present on the evening some of whom will need to walk around with a microphone so the public can hear the questions raised. The Senior Officers of the Council will be on hand to help direct Chairs with any answers to questions.
- It has been customary to provide non-alcoholic refreshments which could be covered by the opening of 1863.
- Officers usually create a PowerPoint presentation of the Town Council's work during the previous year which is shown at the meeting.

Other suggestions:

Publicity

In addition to the advertisement in the Witney Gazette, officers intend to advertise in the annual delivered newsletter (timeframe permitting), place posters in all of the town centre and town council locations, on the Website, and publish on social media.

Community Engagement

Members are asked to consider whether any external parties to come along on the evening. This is usually groups to whom grants have been provided to in the previous year. This may also be an opportunity for the Ranger to carry out some ad-hoc customer feedback.

Security

Officers are acutely aware of negative treatment of Councillors and Council staff in recent months, on this and other Oxfordshire Councils. Officers will cover security in the event's risk assessment.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Given recent actions directed at Councillors from other authorities, members may like to consider whether additional security is required during the performance.

Financial implications

- There is a charge for advertising the Annual Town Meeting in the local newspaper and there is an allocated budget of £250 for this (budget line 4031/701).
- There is no further budget for this meeting.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Agree the layout and format so necessary arrangements can be made and;
2. Consider potential community engagement on the evening.