

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date:	Monday, 5 February 2024
Title:	Annual Town Meeting
Contact Officer:	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk

Background

The Annual Town Meeting, the holding of which is a statutory requirement, is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 20 March 2024. 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.

With local elections and anticipated general election this year, it is anticipated a higher number of residents may 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 ask that the Council consider two options regarding the seating layout:

1. To have the seating out as an auditorium event with Councillors and participants on the stage (Approx 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 what was utilised in 2023; it was broadly thought to offer a more inclusive feel for the electorate and gives the opportunity to be more informal, particularly during the Questions and Answer 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/C.E.O 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 will need to write a report about the work undertaken by their committee during the last year.
- There will be an official agenda, copies are prepared for the public and usually put on a table at the front of the hall, this pack would also include copies of 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 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 provided by the opening of Café 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, screen in the Admin Office and publish on its 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 other 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.

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 if Café 1863 should be opened and;
3. Consider potential community engagement on the evening.