

## **POLICY, GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

---

**Date:** Monday 1 February 2021

**Title:** Annual Town Meeting

**Contact Officer:** Democratic Services Officer – Nichola Cayley

---

### **BACKGROUND**

The Annual Town Meeting, the holding of which is a statutory requirement, is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 17 March 2021. THIS IS NOT A TOWN COUNCIL MEETING.

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

However, this year it is unlikely that the meeting will be able to be held in person due to the ongoing pandemic. At present there is no date set for the end of lockdown and even if this does end by the 17 March, the country is expected to return to a tiered system. Even in a low tier a gathering of more than 30 inside would probably not be permitted. With 17 councillors plus officers it would not leave much room for the electorate – and it is of course, their meeting.

The Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12, Part III states that the annual parish meeting must be held between 1 March and 1 June. This does give the Council the opportunity to delay the meeting if it so wishes but it must be held by 1 June.

The other option is to hold the meeting virtually by Zoom on the scheduled date of 17 March. The number would be limited to 99 attendees, however. Even if the date is moved to a later date, there is still the possibility that it may not be able to go ahead in person.

Thames Valley Police usually participate in the meeting by giving a short presentation on the Neighbourhood Policing in Witney and answer questions. They could still be invited but it would not be possible for them to answer questions from the public due to the complex nature of running the meeting.

invitations are also normally extended to Witney District and County Councillors to attend. This would still be possible via Zoom.

It is customary for Chairmen of Committees to compile and present a report at the Annual Town Meeting giving details of the work of their Committee over the preceding year. Last year only the Mayor addressed the meeting, with Committee Chairs writing reports that were printed and available at the meeting. Members are asked to consider how they wish to proceed with this. If a virtual meeting is held, all reports would be available on the Town Council's website.

It is a statutory requirement to advertise the meeting in a local newspaper. In addition to this it will be advertised via the Town Council's website and social media, notices displayed on public noticeboards and distributed to Councillors to display as appropriate, in the Witney Library and West Oxfordshire District Council Town Centre Shop, and entry in the 'Witney Advertiser' and inclusion in the 'What's On' section on BBC Radio Oxford.

### **Refreshments**

It is customary to offer refreshments but even if the meeting is held in person this is not advisable during the current pandemic.

### **Opportunity to engage with and seek public opinion on services?**

This is a statutory meeting and therefore there is a set agenda for the official part of the meeting. Unfortunately, the Council will not be able to engage with the electorate in the usual way if a virtual meeting is held. Any questions would need to be submitted to the Town Clerk at least 48 hours before the meeting. The Town Clerk would then read them out during the meeting.

### **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, but unfortunately this is a statutory requirement.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is requested to make its recommendations on the format for this year's Annual Town Meeting, namely:

1. Should the meeting be rescheduled from 17 March to an alternate date before 1 June and if not, should the meeting go ahead via Zoom?
2. Should District and County Councillors be invited to attend and participate in the meeting?
3. Will reports be compiled by Committee Chairs or one report by the Mayor for presentation at the meeting?

4. If Committee Chairs compile reports, will they read them out at the meeting or just make them available on the website?
5. Does the Committee have any further suggestions for advertising the meeting, taking into account the current "Stay At Home" order?
6. Does the Committee wish to invite Thames Valley Police to participate in this year's meeting?