

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 31 January 2022

Title: Annual Town Meeting

Contact Officer: Democratic & Legal Services Officer - Simon Wright

Background

The Annual Town Meeting, the holding of which is a statutory requirement, is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 16 March 2022. 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.

There was no Annual Town Meeting held in 2021 due to the pandemic. Therefore it is important that a meeting is held in 2022, ideally face to face, subject to any ongoing restrictions or guidance that may be in place. 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.

Current Situation

Date of Meeting

In light of the ongoing situation with Covid 19 and also the works to the Corn Exchange with regard to the new seating members are requested to consider whether the meeting should be held in March or whether it would be better to move it to April or May when works are finished and the Covid-19 virus may be subdued by the warmer weather.

Format of Meeting

On the assumption that it is possible to hold the meeting 'in person' at the Corn Exchange members will need to decide on the format for the meeting. The following are suggestions for decision/discussion:

- There are two choices with regard to the format of the meeting. Firstly, it could be held as before with round tables for the public with members facing them, or holding it lecture theatre style with the retractable seating. The round tables afford the opportunity that they could be designated for each committee/chair following the main part of the meeting. The lecture theatre style would mean the café could effectively be a Councillor surgery after the main part of the meeting for each committee

- Each Chair & The Mayor need to write a report about the work undertaken by their committee and as the Council did not have the opportunity to speak about the work completed last year, these should effectively cover 2 years
- It is a statutory requirement to advertise the meeting in a local newspaper. In addition to this it would be advertised via the Town Council's website and social media, notices displayed on public noticeboards and distributed to Councillors to display as appropriate.
- 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 Chair's reports.
- Witney Ward members from WODC/OCC are invited but do not take part in the formal part of the meeting
- Officers usually create a PowerPoint presentation of the Town Council's work during the previous year which is shown at 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
- Thames Valley Police are invited to attend and usually present a report and answer questions.
- 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.
- It has been customary to provide refreshments but this would again be subject to any guidance in place at the time, and this could be covered by the opening of 1863.

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).

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Agree a date for the Annual Town Meeting in light of the information in the report; and
2. Agree the format of the meeting to allow officers to make the necessary arrangements.