

**BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY 18TH FEBRUARY 2020**

LJ/2020

10th February 2020

REPORT TO TOWN COUNCILLORS

AGENDA ITEM 13 – COUNCIL MEETINGS MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21

AIM

1. *To consider arrangements for Council meetings during the municipal year May 2020 to May 2021*

BACKGROUND

2. The Town Council is required to approve its meeting dates at the Annual Council meeting in May. It is customary to consider dates well ahead of the May meeting.
3. The Council is required to meet annually in May and on at least three other occasions during the Year (LGA 1972 Sch 12, para 8)

DISCUSSION/ COMMENT

4. Bridgnorth Town Council currently meets as Full Town Council (once or twice a month), or in committees; it currently has 3: Planning, Christmas & Events and Personnel. In the current municipal year it has/ is scheduled to meet 45 times.
5. Meetings might best be considered business meetings, at which the Council or Committee makes decisions on the facts presented to it (general discussion, thinking out loud and working out what to do can be managed through working groups).

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

6. Before confirming meeting dates for committees it might be a good idea to confirm the purpose of committees and understand the benefits (to the Council and the residents) of each committee e.g:
 - Can the business be done within Full Council?
 - Is there capacity in Full Council meetings to accommodate some of the committee agenda items?
 - Does the committee structure speed business up or slow it down?
 - If there are very few delegated powers to Committees then would they not better operate as working groups?

Personnel Committee:

7. It is good practice to appoint a personnel committee if for nothing else it provides a readymade group to defer disciplinary & grievance matters to as well as complaints; one that allows the Full Council to consider any appeals.

Christmas & Events Committee

8. The current committee might be more flexible and able to respond to developing matters if it were a working group; it can meet on an ad-hoc basis and at short notice and if there are significant points to bring to Council then reports can be submitted. The infrastructure elements of Christmas lighting fall within standard Property and Grounds Management work and items relating to that (tenders etc) would still need to be taken to Full Council. The Council might still wish to nominate a Councillor to lead and be deputy of the Group and they could work with the staff in shaping and delivering the 3 Council led events within Council agreed budgets (Christmas Light switch-on, Carnival and Teddy Bears Picnic). The advantage of the working group is that the makeup of the group can shrink and expand around a core membership depending on expertise required.

Planning Committee

9. The planning committee currently operates in a reasonably standard model for local parishes; a list of all planning applications is received with a committee deciding how to compose a written response. At unitary authority level reports are written by staff (qualified in planning matters) and in the vast majority of cases they also have delegated authority to decide (with elected politicians presiding over the more contentious or complex planning applications). Planning decisions are made and challenged with due consideration for the NPPF.
10. Many planning applications are small and not particularly contentious and it is likely that many similar applications; for a loft conversion, a side extension or some tree works will have standard responses.
11. I note that many residents appear to be under the impression that the Town Council has some role in the decision making process, when it is merely a consultee that provides comment. That it might be a very objective consultee (as the 'neighbour of everyone' in the parish) can mean the Council provides valued comment to the decision makers when there are competing views.
12. It is already current practice of the committee to defer large scale planning applications to the Town Council.
13. The Council might want to consider having a virtual planning committee. This is where all members of the Council are committee members and at the beginning of each year it can agree to delegate planning application responses to an officer of the Council under some conditions including:

- a. That where the application received is not dissimilar to other applications the Council has considered previously, a similar response can be submitted – a consistent approach.
 - b. That each member of the Council is asked to provide comment.
 - i. Where there is general agreement in responses received the officer is to submit a representative view.
 - ii. Where there are no responses from Councillors then a nil return is acceptable.
 - iii. Where there are differing responses the officer(s) in consultation with the Chair and/or Deputy Chair confirm a view based upon material planning considerations.
 - c. That where the application has little or no impact on its neighbours or the wider community (replacing fencing, tree works, new windows, simple works that only require a planning application by the nature of being in a conservation area) no response is necessary.
 - d. That the Chair of the planning committee has oversight of submissions made and may, where a large scale/novel or complex application is received submit the application to Full Town Council for consideration or convene an extraordinary meeting of the planning committee.
 - e. Publishing a set of Bridgnorth Town Council Planning principles which might include:
 - Build on brown field before green
 - Ensure maintenance of/ enhancement of biodiversity
 - Maintain the character of the Town as a slowly evolving historical market town that understands the benefit of tourism
 - Encourage development that promotes sustainability
 - Support development that is energy efficient
 - f. Another advantage to a delegated system might be that applications can be considered as they arrive and responded to on a continual rolling programme, as opposed to bulk consideration at committee meetings.
14. A second scheduled planning committee meeting could be held 4 or 5 months into the year to review decisions made and check whether the officers are responding as the Council had intended. If not, then firmer guidance can be given or regular planning meetings can be reintroduced.

ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING:

15. Bridgnorth Town Council has a custom of holding a Mayor Making ceremony in May at which there is much ceremony and theatre surrounding the election of the Mayor, with all other business deferred to a later meeting (usually the week after) and with a Civic Sunday parade and service on the Sunday between the two.
16. The Annual meeting of the Council is set out in legislation to be the AGM of the Council which includes: appointment of officials; approving policies & procedures and confirming good governance principles. Members should note that it is not always the case that the Mayor elect will be approved on the night, the vote in February is non-binding. A change of mind by one or 2 councillors or, a slightly different attendance than was at the mayor elect meeting earlier in the year might well lead to unnecessary embarrassment when the winning nomination might change.
17. Having the Annual Council meeting as a pure business meeting with a Civic Sunday being dedicated to pomp, ceremony and community engagement could provide a simple way to separate the 2 components. This would lead to the removal of the need to hold an 'adjourned' annual meeting.

SUMMARY

18. The Council will need to consider what meeting structure it might prefer going forward.
19. A first draft schedule of meeting dates (and committees) is enclosed which is relatively similar to that seen this year.
20. There are a variety of options and combinations that might be suitable (including the current format)

RECOMMENDATION

21. It is recommended that from May 2020 the Town Council.
 - a. Re-creates the Christmas & Events committee into a working group.
 - b. Creates a 'virtual planning committee' of all members.
 - c. Re-models the Annual Council meeting to a standard AGM/business meeting, with Civic Sunday being a celebration event.
 - d. Identifies proposed dates for Full Council meetings.



Lee Jakeman
Town Clerk

DRAFT - Bridgnorth Town Council Schedule of Meetings Municipal Year 2020 / 2021

Full Town Council¹	Planning Committee²	Christmas & Events³	Personnel Committee	Annual Town Meeting
12/14 May 2020 19 May (delete) 2 June 16 June Delete 21 July 18 August 1 September 15 September 6 October 20 October 3 November 17 November 1 December 15 December 19 January 2021 2 February 16 February Delete 16 March 20 April ?? May 2020	1 June 6 July 3 August 7 September 5 October 2 November 7 December 11 January 2020 1 February 1 March 5 April	2 June 27 October	29 May 11 September	TBC

¹ Full Town Council meetings will normally commence at 7:15 pm and be held in College House, St Leonards Close

² Planning Committee meetings will normally commence at 7:15 pm and be held in College House, St Leonards Close.

³ Both the Christmas & Events Committee and the Personnel Committee will consider dates of any subsequent meetings at their first meeting.