

**BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL
ADJOURNED ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY 16TH MAY 2016**

Agenda item no.: 19 i) a) ii)

Advisory Note from the Town Clerk

Decision Making Issues

- At the May Council meeting, both tradition and Standing Orders require the Council to appoint its Committees for the Year.

The Council is provided with a list of Committees as set out in Appendix I.

- In addition, a Notice of Motion has been received from Councillor Ron Whittle that is also set out as Appendix H to the agenda. The Motion is supported by a case for change.
- The Town Clerk, as Proper Officer has also provided a summary of matters that elected members should properly consider as part of the discussion together with a compromise option that may assist a process of change.

Operational and Legal Matters

In conjunction with the debate on the Motion consideration needs to be given to the following:

- The impact on existing staffing arrangements in the office and their staff contracts – currently staff are Committee Clerks to Committees that fall within their remit as part of their role
- The impact of such change on the additional responsibilities and demands to be placed on the offices of the Mayor (and the Deputy Mayor) in terms of dual civic and business roles
- Will the enhanced role of the Mayor put off other Councillors from taking the role in future with the time and responsibility commitments?
- The Office of the Mayor has no power or decision making role in accordance with LGA1972 S101
- The Mayor (and no Councillor) can act as Committee of one
- The Council has been keen to involve external expertise and views in some of its activities. How will this be continued if democracy will be restricted to just elected members and other contributions will be restricted to Public Session time? What will be the public perception?
- The Mayor will always have the casting vote if there is an equal number of votes on any matter

- Councils can co-opt local residents/ the public onto Committees and Working Parties therefore allowing them to become involved in the decision making process of the Council whilst getting involved in life of the town. This could not happen if there were only full council meetings (in the last term there were co-opted members of the public on Planning and Christmas Lights Committees' as well as outside representatives on the CCTV Committee and the Community Events Working Party)
- The requirement for change to the established financial templates of accounts
- How would an emergency meeting be called for a special subject matter when full council may not be the relevant place for the matter to go to?

Option

It is accepted that the current Committee system is cumbersome, duplicates time and resources from a staff perspective and importantly takes huge amounts of Councillor time. Arguably many past disputes can be pin pointed to where a Committee has made a recommendation based on information and advice but this has been overturned in Council.

A view consistently expressed has been that several councillors are excluded from Standing Committees by the current system and their only opportunity to contribute is at full Council. The clear issue being raised is that the system is therefore not inclusive.

Inclusiveness is important recognising that the new Councillors will have been presented with many issues during their election campaign and a proper and full opportunity is needed to discuss them.

Councillor Whittle presents a good and sensible argument for change but perhaps an easy option applies as a half-way house situation.

It is therefore suggested that elected members, should they wish change, consider making the existing Standing Committees comprise of all Councillors from May 2017 and each Committee then appoint a Chairman from its membership. *(This is the long standing arrangement carried out by Oswestry. They accept that a Committee of the Council should be chaired by the Mayor by legislative wording but no legal challenge has ever been taken nationally.)*

The benefits of this suggestion are:

- It is inclusive and presents strong local democracy in action
- The Chairmanship and workload of all councillors is shared
- Newly elected members of the Council have the opportunity to participate fully in all matters being dealt with by the Council
- The role of the Councillor and their experience can be developed
- Complex change to staff job descriptions and financial software can be avoided
- A compromise between tradition and significant change is reached
- The system can be reviewed in 9 months and if it is failing then experienced and newly elected councillors can then jointly share views and experience of

the first year of the council term and agree any change to be introduced in May 2018.

- Committees that involve outside representatives, skills and experience can be continued and additional membership can be encouraged

Sub-Committees and Working Parties can then be chosen either from within the Committees to which they report or by Full Council.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO PAST DISCUSSIONS ON THIS MATTER

As information the Council is informed that such a matter was considered by the previous Council on the 14th November 2016 at the Extra-ordinary Town Council meeting following a proposal from Councillor Ron Whittle

The minutes from this meeting read as follows:

- ii) c That commencing from the start of the 2017/18 year*
 - i. the Council meets every two weeks except for the month of August.*
 - ii. other Committees cease to exist with the exception of the Planning Committee and a new Personnel Committee*

Members were asked to note that elections to the Town Council are scheduled for Thursday 4th May 2017 and the following relevant provisions of Standing Order 1j concerning matters to be considered at the first meeting of the Council in a municipal year:

- (iii) Review of delegation arrangements to committees, sub-committees, employees and other local authorities.*
- (iv) Review of the terms of references for committees.*
- (v) Receipt of nominations to existing committees.*
- (vi) Appointment of any new committees, confirmation of the terms of reference, the number of members (including, if appropriate, substitute councillors) and receipt of nominations to them.*
- (xvii) Setting the dates, times and place of ordinary meetings of the Council for the year ahead."*

Accordingly, the establishment of Committees and meeting dates normally takes place at the Adjourned Annual Meeting

Counc. D Cooper has proposed the following amendment to this motion:

"Building upon the views expressed by members during strategy meetings held in 2015 and 2016, that a Working Practices Task and Finish Group of 5 members be established to examine options for the way in which the Council may wish to serve

Bridgnorth's residents in the future and define appropriate structures to suit those options, a report to be prepared by 31st March 2017."

Cllr Mrs Barlow advised that she could see the benefits of reducing some meetings because sometimes decisions are made in other committees and then they have to wait for full Council Meeting.

Cllr. Ms V Voysey suggested that this would not be as easy to implement as first thought because would have to consult with all members of staff who support the committee meetings as it would change their roles. In addition, all Councillors would need to be here, but other committees have the required experience.

Cllr R Whittle said that it would mean just one committee and two Council meetings per month. This would mean that Council meetings would be shorter because of meeting more regularly and it would take less time to revisit the minutes. He suggested that not everything would be looked at every meeting. Cllr D. Seipel agreed that it may allow rapid decision making. Cllr R Gill disagreed. Cllr Seipel suggested if decisions were made, they could be implemented the next day. This would avoid blaming Councillors for delaying decisions. By removing the P&G and A&GP committees these could be amalgamated into the second Council meeting of the month.

Cllr Cooper suggested that a Task & Finish group could investigate the option further.

Cllr. R. Whittle said that the changes could be implemented immediately. Cllr Mrs V Gill advised that this would be riding roughshod over members of staff and job descriptions relate to specific committees. The Town Clerk agreed that the Council could not just amend people's jobs without consultation.

Cllr Gittins was concerned that when meetings do not finish and have to be adjourned there was a danger that the Council would have to meet every week. Cllr. Ms Voysey advised that she liked the idea to save going over the same thing twice and it would be good for planning to meet every two weeks, but it would need some research.

Oswestry Town Council has committees made up of all Councillors so everyone has the opportunity to get involved in everything, although they still have specialists.

Cllr D Cooper explained that he had proposed the amendment as he felt that the Council was not giving enough attention to their role and that the Council needed to be more aware of what the demands will be on the Council in future. He advised that with Shropshire Council and NHS cutbacks, the Town Council will be expected to do more and suggested that the Council should look at what they may be asked to do in the future.

Cllr R Whittle advised that his view would be that there were two main committees each month in addition to the CCTV meeting and he had no objection to planning being included in the two meetings.

Alison Lawrence advised that the capacity of staff must be reviewed and given consideration. Ms V. Voysey agreed that this is not simple and will impact upon members of the community and staff.

Amendment from Cllr Cooper re: Council meetings

*For: Councillors Ms. V. Voysey, G. Mountcastle, R. Gill,
Mrs V. Gill, D. Cooper, Mrs C. Baines, J. Gittins*

*Against: Councillors D. Seipel, E. Marshall, Mrs C. Walden,
Mrs. J. Onions, R. Whittle, G. Davies, A. Hinton*

Abstain: Councillors Mrs S. Barlow, Mrs C. Whittle

Using the Town Mayor's casting vote Councillor Ms V. Voysey voted for the amendment therefore it became the substantive motion.

Cllr. Ms. Voysey advised that she did not necessarily disagree with the proposal, but needed more information

Substantive Motion on the Amendment ii) c) above:

*For: Councillors Ms. V. Voysey, G. Mountcastle, R. Gill,
Mrs V. Gill, D. Cooper, Mrs C. Baines, J. Gittins*

*Against: Councillors D. Seipel, E. Marshall, Mrs C. Walden,
Mrs. J. Onions, R. Whittle, G. Davies, A. Hinton*

Abstain: Councillors Mrs S. Barlow, Mrs C. Whittle

Using the Town Mayor's casting vote Councillor Ms V. Voysey voted in favour.
