



Dear Councillor

24 January 2019

You are summoned to attend a meeting of the **TOWN COUNCIL** to be held on **TUESDAY 29 JANUARY 2019 at 7.30 pm** in the **COUNCIL CHAMBER**, Town Hall, West Borough, Wimborne Minster.

COUNCILLORS ARE REMINDED TO BRING WITH THEM TO THIS MEETING ANY WRITTEN REPORTS TO COMMITTEES TO WHICH THEY MAY WISH TO REFER.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Lawrence Hartley'.

Town Clerk

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Before commencement of the formal agenda, members of the public are invited to ask questions of the Council at the Chairman's discretion.

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence.
- 2 To confirm the Minutes of the **TOWN COUNCIL MEETING** held on 4 December 2018 (pages 7302, 7303, 7304 and 7305).
- 3 To confirm the Minutes of the **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL** held on 14 December 2018 (page 7308).
- 4 To confirm the Minutes of the **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL** held on 15 January 2019 (pages 7314, 7315 and 7316).
- 5 To receive the Minutes of the **RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held on 4 December 2018 (page 7301).
- 6 To receive the Minutes of the **PERSONNEL COMMITTEE** held on 14 December 2018 (pages 7306 and 7307).
- 7 To receive the Minutes of the **PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held on 8 January 2019 (pages 7310 and 7311).
- 8 To receive the Minutes of the **RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held on 15 January 2019 (pages 7312 and 7313).



- 9 **DORSET COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT** (if any).
- 10 **EAST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCILLORS' REPORTS** (if any).
- 11 **TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT**
- 12 **TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES' REPORTS** (if any).
- 13 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**
To suspend Standing Orders Number 30 (standing to speak) and those parts of Number 29 relating to speaking more than once.
- 14 **COUNCIL STRUCTURE**
To consider the report of the Chairman of the Council and Town Clerk (previously circulated).

LOCALISM ACT 2011 and CODE of CONDUCT

Members are reminded to comply with those elements of the Localism Act and the Town Council's Code of Conduct in respect of disclosable pecuniary interests.

GENERAL CONDUCT

Members are reminded that the Council has a general duty to consider the following matters in the exercise of any of its functions: Equal Opportunities (race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and any disability), Crime & Disorder, Health & Safety, Human Rights and Data Protection (General Data Protection Regulation).

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Date: 8th January 2019
Author: Chairman of the Council and Town Clerk
Title: Future of Wimborne Minster Town Council

INTRODUCTION

Since WMTC has become aware of the plans for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), thought has been given to the potential impact the changes may have on the Town Council. Over the past couple of years, much discussion has been had about services and responsibilities that may filter down from the new authority and how this could affect budgets and resources.

Deciding on and implementing change has been difficult since so much is still unknown but work has been done in some areas to attempt to anticipate impacts. There is also the matter of numerous new developments on the horizon which will also affect the workload of Council staff, particularly in relation to additional recreational areas which are being offered to the Council (to own and maintain).

Due to ever increasing pressures on the staff, now is the time to consider an outline business plan for the next 3 years and associated changes that will be necessary.

OUTLINE BUSINESS PLAN OVERVIEW

- a) To grow the admin staff to acceptable standards and bring into line with other similar Town & Parish Councils. Capacity needs to be built in for sickness, holidays as well as new projects. Reliance on unpaid overtime to be eliminated.
- b) To review roles and more accurately define job descriptions with known skill sets required.
- c) To accurately define 'grounds staff' requirements taking into consideration likely additional recreational areas to come within WMTC ownership. There could be income generating opportunities with a larger workforce.
- d) To remain in the existing buildings with upgrades and investment to refurbish, modernise and create a better, larger working environment. To include retaining the rented office and changes to the Council Chamber which will generate more rentals and increase income.
- e) To streamline and modernise the work procedures, including but not limited to, structures, roles and meetings insofar as they relate to Members liaison and activity.
- f) To look at ICT infrastructure to enable more flexible working and modernise Member activity and reduce paper costs.

A more detailed outline business plan will be written to include finer detail on all of the above overview points.

FIRST STEPS

At this point Members need to appreciate and support the need for change before there is no longer headroom in which to implement it i.e. LGR has taken place and the overflow of work has such a significant impact on WMTC, that there is no space or time to implement counter measures.

This could have a catastrophic impact on the Council's effectiveness.

There are some measures that can be taken immediately and before LGR, these are what this paper sets out for your consideration.

STRUCTURE CHANGES

WMTC have been looking at the structure of the Council in terms of officers and their workload for over a year (as started by the S&R Review Project). Some changes have been implemented but there is still work to do and the workforce is still over stretched.

This is largely due to many more projects coming forward which are not necessarily optional e.g. GDPR implementation, resident contact/ ideas (WRAG), new developments (associated consultations), draft Local Plan consultation and LGR (Community Assets). These are just some examples of work that is over stretching the office staff.

With LGR now very close to completion (and already taking up more time), attention is now also being given to the structure of the Council with regard to Members, their roles and the Committee structure.

The overriding objectives are;

- to make efficiency gains, thereby ensuring costs are contained,
- to ensure the smooth running of the Council operation,
- introduce continuity and consistency of Member approach and leadership,
- improve decision making,
- reduce the number of meetings.

BACKGROUND

Over the years some changes have taken place with regard to committees e.g. having a Policy & Review Committee (and then removing that) and having more Extraordinary Council meetings in order to involve the whole Council in discussions and decision making.

Feedback has been given by Members that there are currently too many meetings and largely they don't last very long. Given each meeting requires officer attendance, Agenda and Minutes prep (including the giving notice of such meetings and website updates); there is room for efficiency gains and a re think in this area.

Town and Parish Councils vary in their structure of roles and meetings and the current workload and forthcoming LGR changes, is a catalyst for WMTC to now look in more detail at alternative options.

WMTC is not a party political Council and concern has been expressed that any alternations to the structure could change this. Equally it has been said that with the huge shedding of political Cllrs from the District Councils which are being disbanded, these displaced individuals may enter Town and Parish Councils and change the scenery in that regard anyway.

RESEARCH

There are other Town and Parish Councils that have changed the typical structure of Mayor/Chairman and Committees. These changes appear to be working successfully for them.

For a full Cost Benefit Analysis to be done, the following information would have to be calculated;

- Approximate work time to prep for each of the Committees = time and = £
- Approximate cost of paperwork £
- Approximate time for minutes and posting on Web
- Cost of attendance of staff.
- The average length of a committee meeting (estimated to be less than 25 mins).

This would enable us to fully breakdown the savings to the Council and to have those figures for a post implementation review to confirm benefits are realised – around any committee changes.

PURPOSE

The reasons for looking to change are set out in the Objectives above (see Introduction).

The purpose of this document is to inform discussion and gather feedback from other Members so that a way forward can be agreed, this report amended and for it to go to Full Council for agreement and later implementation.

CURRENT SITUATION

All Members are equal, none have executive powers. Decisions on behalf of the Council sometimes initially go to the relevant Committee but some then have to be ratified at Full Council.

Occasionally an Extraordinary meeting of the Council will be held where Standing Orders are suspended i.e. the meeting runs more as a committee. In these cases, matters are discussed once and a decision made without further steps for ratification.

In 2015 in particular, there were many more Extraordinary meetings and the feedback at the time was that decisions were being made more quickly and Members felt involved in decision making.

Role of Town Mayor/Chairman

Mayor

The Town Mayor takes on a public facing role and will act as Ambassador for the town in other parts of Dorset (and beyond) and will attend public functions, events, judging and festivals in town as requested. This is a time-consuming role and requires the necessary availability of the Member.

The Town Mayor usually selects one or more charities to support during the year and will take it upon themselves to attempt some fund raising activities on their behalf.

There are no particular skill requirements for this role other than being comfortable socialising in a variety of situations and to perform some public speaking.

Chairman

The Town Mayor is also the Chairman of the Council and must Chair all meetings of the Council if present. In addition to the required duties as detailed above, in recent years, the Chairman has also acted as a 'Lead Member' and liaises with the Town Clerk with regard to the day to day and strategic matters of the Council.

To be compliant with employment law, the Town Clerk must be appropriately 'managed' and this role is undertaken by the Chairman of the Council on behalf of the Council. Therefore the Chairman should have an understanding of the obligations they have with regard to employment law and ensure the Town Clerk and in turn other staff are managed as they should be.

The role of 'Chairman' of the Council is significantly different to that of the Town Mayor and having to perform both of these roles could exclude some Members from stepping forward as they do not feel they could or would want to do both. There may also be the situation where a Member does step forward regardless and is unable to perform one of these roles adequately and this can have a significant adverse effect on the operation of the Council if there is not a functional Chairman in particular i.e. the Member does not have adequate skills to provide leadership (for example, one or more of the following skill sets; business, strategy, financial and particularly HR skills as they are essential given the legal obligations of the Council).

The Town Mayor/Chairman usually changes each year. This disrupts the continuity of the working relationship with the Town Clerk and therefore potentially momentum of ongoing projects.

The description of Chairman however does not specifically refer to being a 'lead or strategic Member' so there is potential to move some of the more strategic aspects to an alternative position/Member role.

PROPOSAL OPTIONS

There are a number of options available, some of which can be selected alongside each other, others are mutually exclusive. For example, only one option can be selected from each of sections 1, 2 and 3.

1. Vary lead roles (Chairman/Town Mayor Role Changes)

1a Vice-Chairman to act as strategic lead

The Chairman/Town Mayor to be the public face of the Town Council i.e. this role is to Chair meetings of the Council and be the Town Mayor. There would be no further onerous strategic activity expected of the role.

The Vice-Chairman to undertake the strategic aspects i.e. the management and business side of the role. They would work closely with the Town Clerk whilst always keeping the Chairman of the Council informed.

The principle behind this approach is to enable members to put themselves forward as Town Mayor without the necessity of having the skills or inclination to undertake the 'business' side of the role.

The Vice Chairman would not be expected to 'step up' to Town Mayor at the end of the year, but to continue in the 'business' role and remain as Vice Chairman. For purposes of continuity, it would be desirable to aim for at least 2 consecutive years, but ideal for a full electoral term.

Caveat: If a member considering putting themselves forward for Chairman/Town Mayor would prefer to be involved in the 'business' side in addition to the Town Mayor role, they would need to make this clear to the whole Council and the current Vice-Chairman so that other members could understand what role the applicant was wanting to take on. They would then be working closely with the Vice-Chairman, rather than replacing the Vice-Chairman in that role.

1b Re Introduce the Policy & Review Committee

This option would leave the roles of Chairman and Vice Chairman in the traditional sense (not the way the current Chairman is working as the strategic lead), but would see more of the strategic business handled by the P & R Committee. This would enable the continuity of leadership that is very much needed.

A Chairman of this Committee would be appointed (not the Chairman of the Council) and that Chairman would act as a strategic contact for the Town Clerk. However, key decisions* made at P & R would still need to be agreed at Full Council, therefore this Committee would not be acting as a Cabinet (where Cabinets have authority to make all decisions without wider Member involvement).

The P & R Committee is made up of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council, along with the Chairman (or appropriate lead – see later options), for each Committee.

These would be public meetings and as such all Members are able to attend to observe and submit questions and comments as is normally the case for such public meetings.

It is considered there is some risk that party politics could become evident in such an arrangement but as WMTC is a non political Council, this is unlikely, at least in the current climate. LGR could potentially impact the make up of WMTC in that respect regardless.

Meetings of this Committee would be monthly formally but may be more frequent informally.

*TBA

1c Lead Member

Introduce a 'lead Member' role alongside the Chairman/Town Mayor to act in the same way as described for the Vice Chairman in 1a (with minimum term aimed at 2 years), leaving the Vice-Chairman in the usual role as deputy to the Chairman/Town Mayor (as now). There is concern that this role might become political. See previous comments in 1b.

1d Do Nothing

Leave arrangements as they are. This is considered a high risk given the reasons stated in this document and the future challenges ahead.

2. Meeting Structure Change Options

Background

Currently there are 3 Committees. Resources Committee meets monthly and Planning & Environment Committee and Recreation & Leisure Committee each meet approximately every 6 to 8 weeks. All meet on a Tuesday evening. Due to the level of business, some of these meetings are over with very quickly e.g. these can be between 5 and 30 minutes. 10 Members are on each committee and Members that are not on the specific Committee, often attend those Committee meetings sitting in the public seating area (and ask to speak as though they were a member of the Committee).

The Full Council meets approximately 6/8 weekly.

Given the attendance by so many Members at each meeting and the fact that some decisions need to be ratified by Full Council, these meetings could be rationalised to save a considerable amount of administration and time (of both officers and Members).

2a Remove Committees

A meeting of the Council 'in Committee' (i.e. an Extraordinary meeting) could be held monthly to deal with all the business that is currently managed in the 3 separate Committees with the usual more formal meeting of the Council quarterly. Decisions made in those initial monthly meetings would not need to be ratified by full Council.

Whilst no Committees would be required, a Lead Member and Deputy of each current Committee area would be elected each year and would be the contact for the Town Clerk on relevant matters – as now with Committee Chairmen.

Those 'lead Members' would be expected to consult where necessary with other Members where ideas, opinions and options are likely to lead to reports and recommendations – as they do now.

This option allows full inclusivity by all Members in all matters but would speed up the democratic process.

At Council meetings, whilst Chaired by the Council Chairman, specific agenda items would be led by the 'Lead Member' where relevant e.g. discussing a planning matter would be led by the Lead Member for Planning.

In one Council nearby, one month 'Planning' matters are dealt with in more detail and the following month, all other matters in more detail. This saves discussing agenda items 'for the sake of it', but instead, having meaningful agenda items and meetings at appropriate intervals.

2b Remove Committee Meetings (as an initial 'pilot' to option 2a)

This option is very similar to 2a but would make reverting to the current system easier if it was found not to be working. It is a way of piloting a new system and could be trialled for 12 months before implementing as 2a.

Members would still be elected to committees and would still have a Chairman and Vice Chairman. The Chairmen could call informal meetings of their committees if it was felt necessary.

However, the business of those committees would be discussed in 'Council in Committee' meetings as described in 2a.

2c Retain Committee Meetings but meet on the same evening.

There would in effect still be Committees but they would meet back to back on the same evening. There is evidence over a reasonable number of years that Committee meetings are often very short and therefore having them on the same evening, should not make the meeting(s) last more than 1.25hrs in total.

The downside for this option is that many of the officer based savings will not be realised as all the administration around meetings would still need to be processed. The only saving would be on actual time at the meeting but would also be less disruptive to the working day (as officers come in much later in the day as they have to attend an evening meeting). The main benefits here would be for Members (time). This option is not the preferred option due to the lack of efficiency gains.

3. Rationalise Committees from 3 to 2

The remit of the 3 existing committees could be reallocated over 2 committees. This is unlikely to result in the desired efficiency gains.

4. Do Nothing

To maintain the current situation will see further over stretching of the office staff given the workload associated with the various meetings. Since we know that a great deal of change is just around the corner, action needs to be taken to gain efficiencies, contain costs and introduce leadership continuity.

If we make no attempt to realise efficiencies as suggested here, it will be difficult to justify precept increases to residents since no action is being taken to reduce costs when we know they can be reduced.

Residents

There is not considered to be any detriment to residents overall. It would in fact be simpler for residents to know that all business of the Council took place on a given day each month –rather than having to understand agendas and which Committees or meetings, items that they are interested in would go to.

Overall, a speeding up of the democratic process and making efficiency gains in the Council to help maintain or reduce costs, is in the best interests of the residents.

Having a leadership mechanism of more than 1 year would also ensure a reliable continuity of 'business' and communication.

Next Steps

- a) All Members to provide input/feedback into the report.
- b) Update the report (with efficiency figures).
- c) Create fuller Outline Business Plan.
- d) Take to Full Council for final decision.
- e) Implementation of changes by new electoral term.