

Abingdon Town Council 24th June 2020

Agenda item 21

Democratic matters including calendar of meetings – report of Town Clerk

Annual meeting

In a “normal” year all committee and their chairs retire at the Annual Meeting/ Mayor making, which by law has to take place in May. The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 has the effect that Councils are not required to have an annual meeting until May 2021, although they may choose to do so. Regulation 4 provides that where an appointment would otherwise be made or is required to be made at an annual meeting of the Council, the appointment continues until the next annual meeting of the authority or until such time as that authority may determine. These appointments include those of Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Committee places. This Council’s Annual Meeting, due on 6th May 2020, was postponed/ cancelled. The date of the Council’s next annual meeting will for the Council to determine although an Annual Meeting must be held in May 2021.

In the absence of an Annual Meeting all committee places remain in place until such time as determined by the Council. It remains within the power of individual members to stand down from a committee and for the Council to appoint committee members.

With regard to Committee chairs and vice-chairs, these are elected by each newly appointed committee following the Annual Meeting. As the Committees have continued in place then these elections have not been held. Again it remains within the power of individual members to stand down from a role and for the Committee then to fill that role.

Virtual meetings

The Regulations also mean that until May 2021 persons attending a council meeting do not need to be in the same place. “Place” means more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers. Being present at a local council meeting includes being present through remote attendance.

Formal meetings recommenced with the Guildhall Committee on 21st May 2020. Following work undertaken by the IT Working Group, Web Ex was been chosen as the meetings platform. Meetings recommenced on Thursday 21st May with the Guildhall Committee and at that point the delegation to the Town Clerk to administer the Council’s services automatically ended, the last delegated action being to re-institute meetings.

Under current regulations the usual meetings in person are not permitted. We await further advice regarding when “in person” council meetings are permitted and we need

to risk assess how this may be undertaken in a Covid secure manner. When moving to physical meetings the council may wish to consider the potential for hybrid meetings, i.e. meetings which enabling mix of physical and virtual presence. The council is reasonably well placed in this regard having an audio-visual system in the Guildhall although consideration will need to be given to improving the internet connection by linking it to the Roysse Court leased line.

Members are requested to note this part of the report.

Committee places

Following the sad passing of Councillor Jeanette Halliday there are a number of vacancies in relation to committee places. These are as follows:

Abingdon Traffic Advisory Committee;

Amenities and Recreation Committee;

Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee.

Jeanette was also a Council representative on the Albert Memorial (Abingdon) Trust, together with Cllr Jim Halliday and Vale Councillors Eric de la Harpe and Robert Maddison; and the nominated liaison with Friends of Abingdon Civic Society

Jeanette's appointments to the working groups in relation to the Albert Park Conservation Area Appraisal, Christmas Lights and New Cemetery will be a matter for the parent committees to determine.

Members are requested to consider appointments to the three committees listed above and the two outside bodies.

Calendar of meetings

The [calendar of meetings](#) for 2021/22 has been recommended for approval by the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The calendar provides for:

- An increase in cycles from four to six per year. More frequent committee meetings will allow business to be expedited more quickly, with no long wait between meetings. Should a particular committee find that a meeting during a cycle is not required then the Town Clerk may consult with the Chair of the Committee to cancel that meeting for lack of business.
- Addition of the Green Advisory and Scrutiny Committee to the calendar.
- Retained meetings for each committee on the same evenings as the current year.
- Avoided meetings during the school holidays, with the necessary exception of Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee.
- Avoided clashes with District Council meetings where possible.
- Drafted the first cycle of 2021/22, which members, public and staff find helpful.

Members are requested to carefully consider the proposed dates so that any which are, for whatever reason, inconvenient, can be changed at this stage. Please consult with your diaries and let us know if any dates are inconvenient or if we have scheduled a meeting which clashes with other known commitments. This will avoid, as far as possible, having to change dates during the course of the year, although it has to be accepted that this may still be necessary on occasion if circumstances so dictate. Once agreed by the Town Council it would be good if the calendar has minimal amendments during the year. However Members may wish to consider what the protocol should be if a meeting date has to be changed.

The Council is requested to agree the calendar of meetings for 2020/21.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
20th June 2020.