

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee
Meeting date	21 June 2022
Report author	Nigel Warner
Agenda item	5 - Governance

Report of Town Clerk

1. **Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 Under the Council's Scheme of Delegation this Committee has responsibility for governance matters and this report details current issues which require decisions.

2. **Summary**

- 2.1 To agree governance matters as detailed in the report.

3. **Action required**

- 3.1 To review and accept the Terms of Reference for this Committee.
- 3.2 To review and accept the Terms of Reference for the Personnel Sub-committee. Town Clerk to report with recommendations for varying these. To also note and endorse the Sub-Committee appointments made by the Council.
- 3.3 Calendar of meetings – to consider the calendar of meetings and make a recommendation to the Council.
- 3.4 Remote access to meetings – to agree a way forward.

4. **Link to strategic plan and objectives**

- 4.1 An efficient system of governance for the Council will assist in achieving the Council's key objectives and in particular KO3: To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future.

5. **Background**

- 5.1 Each year the terms of reference of committees and sub-committees should be agreed.
- 5.2 This year the Personnel Sub-Committee was appointed by the Town Council and this Committee, as parent committee, is asked to endorse the appointments.
- 5.2 The Council must set its calendar of meetings annually. It has deferred setting the calendar for 2022/23 in order to allow for further consideration by members, noting that it has already agreed meetings up to and including 29 June 2022.
- 5.3 During 2021/22 the Council operated on a system of online advisory committees whose recommendations were later agreed by the Council, meeting in person. From 11 May 2022 the Council has returned to its committees meeting in person. This report considers requests from Members to allow for virtual participation for those unable to attend in person.

6. **Key information and options**

- 6.1 The Terms of Reference of this Committee are attached and no amendments are suggested by your officers.
- 6.2 Terms of Reference for the Personnel Sub-Committee are attached, with some tracked suggested changes from me. This includes provision to allow the Sub-Committee to lead on the recruitment and selection of a Town Clerk following my retirement from this position later in the year.
- 6.3 At the Annual Council meeting on 11 May the Council approved the following membership of the Personnel Sub-Committee, which was based on communication received from the ruling group and further e-mails to Members from locum Committee Clerk confirming their committee preferences. The membership was agreed as follows:

Cllr Samantha Bowring
Cllr Neil Fawcett
Cllr Jim Halliday
Cllr Rawda Jehanli
Cllr Pat Lonergan
Cllr Andrew Skinner
Cllr Andy Foulsham – Mayor ex officio

- 6.4 Sub-Committees and Working Groups are usually appointed by the parent committees but the Council, as the supreme body of the organisation, has the ability to appoint any committee, sub-committee and working group. I suggest that the Finance, Governance and Asset Management Committee endorse the membership at 6.3 but also note that any changes from herein are in the remit of this Committee.

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- 6.5 Virtual meetings. At the Council meeting it was agreed that all meetings of the Council and its various committees should be in person, in line with government requirements. My report to the Council on 30 March 2022 referred to going forward with a hybrid-type system “which would enable those unable to attend in person to participate in the meeting, albeit not allowed to vote.” This was not reflected in the resolution agreed by the Council.
- 6.6 I have been asked to review this matter by a number of members as virtual participation would allow Members who would otherwise be unable to attend, to have some role in a meeting. There would also be benefit to officers and members of the public although the position of members, as the decision-makers, is different.
- 6.7 The law requires that meetings are in person. Some councils do not allow any virtual participation by Members on the basis that by so doing they are influencing decisions which must be made in person. However other Councils, including our local district council, do allow a degree of virtual participation whilst ensuring that decisions are made in-person.
- 6.8 The extension of the high-speed broadband to the historic Guildhall means that internet speeds enable us to undertake business with a large monitor and a camera.
- 6.9 The government has indicated their will to move towards allowing councils to conduct hybrid meetings where virtual attendees would have the ability to fully participate.
- 6.10 In the meantime I would suggest that if the committee is content then we have a system to allow for virtual participation subject to the following:
1. Those attending remotely are “in attendance” and are unable to chair, propose or second any action or to vote.
 2. Only those attending “in-person” count towards the quorum.
- 6.11 Draft calendar of meetings is attached, as previously circulated with one change, which is to move the 27 July Council meeting to 3 August. The calendar will be based on six cycles of meetings a year. One area which has been flagged up is that three of the four standing committees are in the draft meeting on a Tuesday and Members are asked to take a view on whether other evenings should be considered. There is also a concern that keeping August free of standing committees means that the July and September cycles are too compressed. This is partly eased by putting the change to the Council meeting to 3 August.
- 6.12 The agreement of the calendar has been previously deferred; we do require a recommendation this evening so that this can be presented to the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2022.

7. **Climate change/green implications**

7.1 For the Council there are no additional implications although providing for and allowing some participation virtually will reduce any environmental costs associated with travel to meetings.

8. **Financial/budget implications**

8.1 None that are not already provided for in the budget.

9. **HR implications**

9.1 None that are not already provided for in the establishment.

10. **Supporting papers and appendices**

10.1 Finance, Governance and Asset Management Terms of Reference.

10.2 Personnel Sub-Committee Terms of Reference.

10.3 Draft calendar of meetings for 2022/23.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
17 June 2022