

Agenda item 3

For decision - Hold monthly Council meetings and cancel the meeting calendar until further notice

Author: Paul Wynne, Town Clerk

Summary

This report proposes to:

- Arrange for The Advisory Group (TAG) to meet on a weekly basis during the Emergency period. It would advise the clerk on making decisions in a timely way between formal Council meetings but with a good level on Cllrs engagement.
- Hold virtual Council meetings on a monthly basis with as full as possible public engagement
- Cancel planned Council and committee meetings.
- Consider when to hold the Annual Town meeting on 24 June.

These arrangements will operate only during the Emergency period at the Council's discretion.

Discussion

This report is the result of a suggestion from Cllr Wrintmore to establish a Cllr body that can meet as and when need be to make decisions quickly on behalf of the Council. I explored the possibility of establishing an Emergency Coronavirus Committee that could meet on a weekly basis to do this. However, the formality of a Committee means that the agenda would need to be published at least five days in advance alongside any reports. This would severely curtail the ability of the Council to make quick decisions.

Holding weekly TAG meetings

As a result, I have explored other ways of increasing Cllrs engagement while retaining the ability to make quick decisions. My proposal is to use The Advisory Group (TAG). This group comprises the following Cllrs: Mayor, Leader, Dep Leader, the chairs of the two committees and of the Planning Advisory Group. As always, it would invite other Cllrs to attend as and when necessary. This group would advise the Clerk on decision making between Council meetings. Staff will attend these meetings as and when needed. However, it is envisaged that the clerk, the deputy clerk and the RFO will always be present.

Meetings will be held on a weekly basis and more or less often reflecting need. A note of the meeting would be sent to all staff and Cllrs as soon as possible after the meeting.

Monthly Council meetings

It is now permitted legally to hold Council and Committee meetings via a video link. To provide a formal level of oversight it is proposed to hold virtual Council meetings on a monthly basis using Zoom software. These monthly Council meetings would operate in the same way as normal Council meetings with an agenda published in advance of the meeting. There would be

opportunities for public engagement, reports and decisions made and formal minutes drafted. These meetings would be able to ratify decisions made by the clerk since the last meeting.

It is proposed that the first of these should be on Wednesday 22 April, the second as planned on Wednesday 20 May - where Cllrs could elect the Mayor, Leader etc - and then the third on Wednesday 24 June. At the meeting on 24 June, Council could decide whether these arrangements need to be continued or whether to revert back to the ordinary calendar of meetings.

Cancellation of Council and committee meetings

The planned committee meetings on 6 May, 10 June, 1 July are proposed to be cancelled. With monthly Council meetings, timely decisions should still be able to be made. At this time, the work of most staff revolves around the need to service the Emergency and so the volume of work related to the work programme and the remits of Committees should be able to be covered in the monthly Council meetings. PAG continues as normal but, again, the monthly Council meeting would be a forum for the more significant planning decisions to be made.

Annual Town Meeting

This meeting is held for the benefit of the electors in the town. It is organized by the Town Council. It was scheduled for 1 April. It is proposed to postpone this meeting (retrospectively) and for Council to agree a new date, if possible, at its meeting on 24 June.

Informal Q&A sessions and IfF meetings

It is proposed to continue on a fortnightly basis with the popular Q&A sessions started on 30 March. It is proposed to hold these alternate Thursdays for the near future. I understand that there are IfF group meetings scheduled for alternate Wednesday's.

The table below summarises the proposed meetings:

Mon		Wed		Thurs	
Apr-20	1pm TAG	22	7pm Council	23	
27	1pm TAG	29		30	7pm Q&A
May-04	1pm TAG	6		7	
11	1pm TAG	13		14	7pm Q&A
18	1pm TAG	20	7pm Council	21	
25	1pm TAG	27		28	7pm Q&A
Jun-01	1pm TAG	3		4	
8	1pm TAG	10		11	7pm Q&A
15	1pm TAG	17		18	
22	1pm TAG	24	7pm Council	25	
29	1pm TAG	1		2	7pm Q&A
Jul-06	1pm TAG				

Recommendations

1. Hold TAG meetings on a weekly basis with immediate effect, a note of each meeting to be circulated to all Cllrs and staff as soon as possible following the meeting
2. Hold Council meetings via Zoom software on 22 April, 20 May, 24 June.
3. Hold fortnightly informal Q&A meeting comprising Cllrs and relevant staff.
4. Cancel the calendar of meetings until further notice and to review this decision on 24 June. PAG meeting to continue virtually.
5. Postpone the Annual Town Meeting and, if possible, set another date at the Council meeting on 24 June.