

TOWN COUNCIL – 16TH MARCH 2020

OPTIONS FOR COMMITTEE STREAMLINING

1. Background

In 2019, the number on two main committees was increased to 13. Members' concerns about the length of Community Services Committee meetings also led to responsibility for the Museum and Blakehay Theatre being transferred to the Museum sub-committee, renamed Heritage Arts and Culture and 'promoted' to being a main committee reporting direct to the full Council. I have now been asked by Group Leaders' meeting to suggest viable ways to streamline the committee structure for two reasons:

Firstly members are attending a lot of meetings and I have been asked to review and if possible reduce the number of seats on the larger committees.

Secondly, I have been asked to review the committee structure to try to streamline decision making and if possible reduce the number of committees.

2. Options to reduce the Sizes of Committees

The following committees now have 13 seats each:

- Policy and Finance Committee
- Community Services Committee
- Tourism and Leisure Committee

Planning Committee and Personnel Committee and the Expenditure & Governance Working Party have 9 members. Anomalously, Heritage Arts and Culture Committee has only 6 members. The Council's current political balance is:

Seats:	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
Full Council	14	11	6
11	5	4	2
10	4	4	2
9	4	3	2
8	4	3	1
7	3	3	1
6	3	2	1
5	2	2	1
4	2	1	1
3	1	1	1

In general, where no group has an overall majority, it is good practice where possible to have committees of an odd number. If you reduced the three largest committees from 13 to *either* 11 or 9 members, that would be a net saving of 6 or 12 meeting seats in each cycle, based on the current committees. If you wanted to go further, you could also reduce Personnel, Planning and E&G from 9 to 7 seats each, there would thus be a further saving of 8 meeting seats in each cycle.

3. Option to reduce the Number of Committees

The **Tourism and Leisure Committee** was created in 2012 to reflect the new tourism and destination marketing function. The service has settled down into a pattern since then and the committee agenda mostly consists of items for information. I have consulted the Chairman who has suggested that it could be abolished and:

- Tourism functions be transferred to Heritage Arts and Culture Committee. It may be thought that there is a good synergy between tourism, arts and heritage. Tourism is mostly about destination marketing and the Weston Museum and Blakehay Theatre which HAC manages are heritage and arts visitor attractions to be marketed.
- Parks and Play Areas could be transferred to Community Services Committee. CSC already has a report from Grounds Manager on all other grounds functions so adding the parks and play areas would be a simple addition to her report and unlikely to significantly lengthen meetings. This would also save the cost and time of the Grounds Manager having to attend two committees.

If there is concern about the length of Community Services Committee meetings, **Grants** tends to be the agenda item that most adds to meeting lengths. An option to avoid this would be to transfer grants back to Policy and Finance Committee who could consider them two or three times a year via a small 3-member sub-committee. This could meet in the daytime and provide more consistency in considering grant applications. It could also help to avoid the need and cost of a member of Finance staff having to attend Community Services meetings.

4. Operation of Planning Committee

Differing opinions have been put forward regarding the value of the Planning Committee, some members have pointed out that area committees have been abolished by North Somerset Council (NSC) and only a few applications are 'called in' for consideration at their Planning and Regulatory Committee. As the largest parish by far in North Somerset there is a heavy workload of applications to get through every 4 weeks.

The Town Council is a statutory consultee. In my experience parish council objections do carry weight especially where an application is referred to committee at NSC and it is important to reflect the local community's view on significant applications. However, the majority of applications are small householder extensions etc. It is not possible to reduce the frequency of Planning Committee dates as the town council is given a limited time - in theory only 3 weeks but in practice 4 - to respond to statutory consultations.

It has therefore been suggested by Group Leaders' meeting that all planning applications received be circulated to town councillors and only considered at Planning Committee if an objection or concern is received from a town councillor (usually but not exclusively a ward member) or direct from a member of the public.

5. Timescale

I recommend that any proposals that are approved take effect from the new municipal year 2020-21 which starts with Mayormaking on 21st May 2020.

6. Options:

The Town Council is asked to consider the following options, which have been approved by group leaders for the Council's consideration:

1. Committees of 13 seats be reduced to *either* 9, 10 or 11 seats.
2. Committees of 9 seats (Planning, Personnel and E&G) be reduced to 7 seats.
3. Tourism and Leisure Committee be abolished and:
 - a. responsibility for its Tourism functions be transferred to the Heritage Arts and Culture Committee.
 - b. responsibility for its Grounds (parks and play areas) functions be transferred to the Community Services Committee.
 - c. The Heritage Arts and Culture Committee be increased in number of Members from 6 to 7 (or 9) plus the existing co-opted non-voting membership.
4. Grants handling be transferred from Community Services Committee to Policy and Finance Committee, with a sub-committee of 3 to be set up to consider grants applications three times a year.
5. All planning applications received be circulated to town councillors and normally are only considered at Planning Committee if an objection or call-in is received from a town councillor or from a member of the public.

Recommendations

1. That the Council selects from all or some of the above options, stating (where relevant) the new number of members for committees.
2. The Town Clerk to prepare amended Committee Terms of Reference to reflect any changes in committee structure for adoption by the Policy and Finance Committee
3. That the changes take effect from the new municipal year which starts with Mayormaking on 21st May 2020.

Malcolm L Nicholson LL.B (Hons), DMS, PSLCC
Town Clerk
26th February 2020

WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL

CALENDAR OF MEETINGS JUNE 2020 – MAY 2021

MEETING	DAY/TIME & VENUE	FREQUENCY	2020							2021				
			JUNE	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
Town Council	Mon, 7pm @ Town Hall	Bi-monthly (Jan budget & May MM)		20		21			23			22		20 Thur 5pm
Policy & Finance Committee	Mon, 7pm @ G/House	Bi-monthly (on the 3 rd Mon)	22		24			19				15	26	
Expenditure & Governance Working Party	Thu, 10am @ G/House	Bi-monthly		2		3			5			4		6
Community Services Committee	Mon, 7pm @ G/House	Bi-monthly		6		14			9			8		10
Heritage, Arts & Culture Committee	Thur, 10am @ Museum/Blakehay	Bi-monthly	11			10			12			18		13
Planning Committee	Wed, 7pm @ G/House	Every 4 weeks	3	1 + 29	26	23	21	18	16			10	7	5
Personnel Committee	Wed, 11am @ G/House	4 x per year		15			28					17	28	
Allotment Management Sub-Committee	Tuesday 7pm @ G/House	Quarterly	30				6						20	
Youth Council	Thur 5.30pm @ the YMCA	Monthly	9	14	11	8	13	10	8			tba	tba	tba
Tourism & Leisure Committee – if required	Mon, 7pm @ G/House	Bi-monthly		27			5		7			8	12	

Weston in Bloom tba**Civic Consultation to be held as and when necessary.*****Annual Town meeting provisional date 6.30pm Monday 15th March 2021**