

Town Council Committee Review

At the October meeting of the Town Council minute point 343/22, the Town Clerk was tasked with writing a report to review the current structure of the Town Council's Committees for consideration at the April meeting.

Background

Currently the Town Council has 2 main committees, Amenities and Services and Finance and Corporate Governance Committee. Each committee is composed of 8 Councillors and meets a minimum of 4 times a year. There are 3 other committees which meet when required Planning, Highways and Climate Change (all Councillors), Local Connection Verification (3 Councillors) and Complaints Committee (3 Councillors). Councillors are appointed to committees at the May meeting of the council.

The decision whether to delegate to a Committee, Sub-Committee or Working Group is for the Council to make. A Council can appoint a committee under the Local Government Act 1972, s101 (1)a. Standing Order 4d permits the Town Council to appoint standing committees or other committees as may be necessary.

Overview of Current Decision Making

The Town Council delegates responsibility to the two main Committees to act on its behalf for specified activities relating to its business. It reserves certain matters to be dealt with by Full Council and, in addition, certain matters specified in law must be dealt with by Full Council.

Currently the two main Committees oversee a large part of the work of the Council with each Committee having delegated powers and some budget responsibilities.

The following table is an extract from the Scheme of Delegation and sets out the responsibilities for each Committee.

Amenities and Services (8)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To discuss and review management and maintenance of assets and services provided by the council including Love Lane Cemetery, Public Toilets including disused toilet block on Wem Recreation Ground, Bus Shelters, CCTV, Streetlights, Love Lane Allotments, Play Areas and public open spaces. This list is not exhaustive as it may be added to during the year should the Town Council take on additional services / assets over the course of the year. 2. To keep under review the policies and procedures for the effective management of Love Lane Cemetery, Public Toilets, Bus Shelters, CCTV, Streetlights, Love Lane Allotments and Play Areas. 3. To review and monitor and award all maintenance/service contracts relating to the Cemetery, Toilets, Bus Shelters, CCTV, Streetlights, Floral Display, Allotments and Play Areas. 4. To authorise works up to the limits set in the budget from the following expenditure budgets Recreation, Public Toilets, Love Lane Cemetery, Love Lane Allotments, bus shelters, CCTV, Streetlighting and floral display for those services and facilities. 5. To recommend to the Full Town Council for inclusion in the draft budget, additional budget items that are related to facilities and services matters. 6 To submit to the Council proposals to develop additional services and facilities.
----------------------------	--

	<p>7. To annually submit to the Council recommendations for fees for use of council facilities and services.</p> <p>8. To review Recreation, Public Toilets, Streetlighting, Bus Shelters, Cemetery, CCTV, Floral Display and Allotment budget cost centres and make recommendations to full council for inclusion in annual budget.</p> <p>9. To recommend to Full Council the earmarking of reserves for specific projects.</p> <p>10. The Committee may form sub-committees or working groups, in an advisory capacity, for individual issues that have a limited life-span.</p> <p>11. Any other matters that may be delegated by Full Council.</p>
<p>Finance and Corporate Governance (8)</p>	<p>Staffing</p> <p>1. To ensure employment and health and safety legislation is adhered to in relation to all staff and to review risk assessments.</p> <p>2. Committee to have the power to resolve the appointment of all staff except the appointment of a Town Clerk, which, by recommendation of this Committee, must be approved by full Council.</p> <p>3. To monitor and review the salary, contract, job description, appraisals and terms and conditions of all staff employed by the Town Council. To recommend to Full Council any staff salary increases.</p> <p>4 To consider and approve the working of additional hours for one off projects subject to the provision in the msc. staffing budget.</p> <p>5. Committee to have the power to resolve employee issues except those referred to the Grievance Panel and the Appeals Panel.</p> <p>6. To nominate Councillors to undertake the Town Clerk's annual Performance Review.</p> <p>7. To review and award the following contracts – payroll, health and safety, year-end accounts close down, computer support, copier.</p> <p>8. To consider staff requests for attendance on training courses that fall outside of the statutory training required in order to carry out the role and either cost over £250 or will exceed the training budget.</p> <p>Finance and Audit</p> <p>1. To monitor and review all financial and staffing policies.</p> <p>2. To monitor quarterly the financial progress of the council's expenditure against budget.</p> <p>3. To appoint the Council's internal auditor.</p> <p>4. To consider and implement recommendations on all reports arising from both internal and external auditors.</p> <p>5. To ensure that an adequate and effective system of internal control is in place to secure the integrity of finances.</p> <p>6. To authorise budgeted expenditure on the following budget codes administration, staffing and Cllr Expenses budget.</p> <p>7. To review administration, staffing and Cllr Expenses budget cost centres and make recommendations to full council for inclusion in annual budget.</p> <p>8. Annually to review all earmarked reserves and recommend to Full Council the reallocation of earmarked reserves which will not be used for the original purpose for which they were established.</p> <p>9. Committee has the authority to delegate areas of responsibility to either a sub-committee, a working group or an officer.</p> <p>10. Any other matters that may be delegated by Full Council.</p>
<p>Planning Highways and</p>	<p>1. The committee shall receive, consider and respond to planning applications from the Local Planning Authority if the deadline for planning comments by consultees falls before the next Full Council meeting, or if any Councillor requests</p>

Climate Change (all)	a meeting of the committee if they consider that a planning application has the potential to have a significant impact on the town. 2. To consider any major highways schemes affecting the town. 3. To consider and comment on all planning policy documents. 4. To approve, monitor and review the Climate Emergency Action plan. 5. To approve expenditure relating to Climate Change Action Plan.
Complaints Committee (3)	1. To investigate complaints about council staff, administration and procedures. 2. Committee to have the power to resolve the outcome of a complaint concerning administrative procedures. Committee to have the power to refer a Complaint to the Town Council if necessary.
Verification Committee (3)	The committee shall have delegated powers to consider and verify applications for confirmation of local connection to Wem as per the Town Council's Local Connection Policy and Local Lettings agreement.

The current list of Liaison Groups/Panels is shown below

Wem Swimming and Lifestyle Centre Liaison Group

Wem Town Ha Liaison Group

Events Liaison Group

Grievance Panel

Discipline Panel

Appeals Panel

Markets Working Group

Christmas Lights Working Group

This report does not consider any changes to the way the liaison groups are operated and run.

Concerns with the Current committee structure

- **Attendance** Over the past year attendance at some committee meetings particularly the Amenities Committee has been reduced. The average attendance at Amenities and Services Committee meetings was 5, average attendance at Finance Committees was 7. Poor attendance can be a problem when major decisions need to be made around expenditure and policies. The Amenities and Services Committee has delegated authority to spend in excess of £100k.
- **Speed of Decision making** Committees of the Council generally meet 4 times a year and any items that need to be brought to those Committee meetings can be held up in the wait for a meeting to arise. In addition to this the decision making process can be delayed further if the decision of the committee is a recommendation, then the matter will have to wait until the next full council meeting for a final decision.
- **Transparency** Committee meetings whilst open to the public seldom attract any members of the public. Attempts have been made to vary the times that the committee meets but this has not encouraged members of the public to attend. Although meeting times are varied to suit the needs of Councillors, Councillors who

have commitments during the day or work full time often struggle to make meetings as well.

- **Councillor Engagement** With major decisions around the management and maintenance of Town Council assets and policies being made by in some cases less than 50% of the Council there is a danger in other Councillors not being fully aware of reasoning behind decisions. Whilst it is acknowledged that all meeting papers are on the website and that minutes of meetings are considered at full council this is not the same as Councillors taking an active part in the decision making process around some important matters that are considered by committees.

Changes to committees - Options for consideration

Option 1 Removal of all committees with all matters being discussed at the monthly full council meeting.

Advantages Increase Councillor engagement, improve attendance and transparency for public, reduce number of meetings, speed up decision making process. If required to discuss specific topics e.g a major planning application an extra ordinary meeting can be arranged. In relation to the complaint committee when a complaint is received a complaints panel can be established to consider the complaint rather than having a separate committee in place.

Disadvantages

- With more business to discuss meetings may need to be longer than the current 2 hours. To address this Standing Order 3x could be amended to increase the length of the time of meetings from 2 hours to 2.5 hours. The meeting start time may have to be brought forward to 18.30 or a later finish of 21.30.
- It is too early to know how any change will impact on the workload of the Clerk and administrative staff although it is anticipated that more reports will be required to be produced on a monthly basis.
- The scheme of delegation of the Amenities and Services, Verification, Planning, Highways and Climate Change Committees can be incorporated into monthly meetings with little impact, however the Scheme of Delegation of the Finance and Corporate Governance Committee deals with a significant amount of Council business such as considering staffing matters, reserves management, policy development, budget monitoring and risk management and all these items will need to be absorbed into the work of Full Council. In order to manage this a schedule of items will need to be developed and worked into the monthly agenda.

Option 2 Maintain the Status Quo

Retain all committees running on the existing delegated powers as agreed in May 2022.

Option 3 Retain existing committees but appoint all Councillors to each committee

The Highways, Planning and Climate change Committee is already composed of all Councillors. Having all Councillors on all committees would solve the issues that have been raised around attendance, transparency and Councillor engagement. It would not however speed up the decision making process as matters that come under the remit of the Amenities and Services Committee would still need to wait for a quarterly meeting. In

addition to this having a Verification Committee and Complaints Committee composed of 14 Councillors would be unwieldy and overkill for the process.

Option 4 - Remove all committees except the Finance and Corporate Governance Committee but increase its membership to all Councillors

As previously explained dealing with all Council business in one meeting will raise challenges and retaining a Finance and Corporate Governance Committee could help to reduce these.

Members may wish to consider retaining the Finance and Corporate Governance Committee but increasing its capacity to include all councillors. This committee could meet at key times each year to consider statutory and best practice financial matters such as the Annual Governance Return and Accounting Statement, the Budget, Audit and Risk Management, Health and Safety. The remit would need to be agreed but would broadly be similar to the delegated authority for the current Finance Committee

It may also be appropriate to establish a staffing subcommittee which would deal with staffing matters and report back to the finance committee.

Option 5

Another option as determined by the Council.