



COMMITTEE RESTRUCTURE

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING REPORT **NEW COMMITTEE**
STRUCTURE

15 APRIL 2024

The purpose of this Report is to recommend Members to agree a restructure of the Council's decision-making committee structure, for the forthcoming municipal year.

1) BACKGROUND

- a) Good governance is essential to any local authority, enabling decisions to be taken in an effective, transparent, accountable, and participatory way. It requires responsible decision-making, adherence to legal frameworks, and fostering community engagement to best meet the needs of the town while upholding ethical standards and promoting the public interest.
- b) The Council has taken steps toward improving its governance, with a comprehensive review of Standing Orders, introduction of new Codes of Practice, agreement to a full Scheme of Delegations, and through the work of the HR Committee this year to put the management of staff onto a proper footing for the first time.

2) DECISION-MAKING

- a) Effective decision-making happens when it is clear how, when and by whom decisions are taken, is supported by appropriate data and professional advice, done openly and minuted so that it is transparent and accessible to the public (both at the time and afterwards), involving elected members according to their knowledge and interests, and with maximum opportunity for those residents and businesses affected by or interested in the decision to participate. Significant decisions should be taken by the full council, but VTC should be able to progress business, within agreed policy and budget, without having frequently to call extraordinary meetings.
- b) The Council has relied upon informal member-staff working groups to progress most of its business between council meetings. These meet in private, and have no formal powers other than the ability to be consulted by officers making decisions already delegated to them, which until recently were undocumented. The public has no right to attend working group meetings, nor is there any published agenda or record that can be inspected by those seeking information or to hold the council to account.
- c) A review of decision-making by other town councils identifies that most employ a structure of committees and sub-committees to deal with business, with informal working groups typically used on a temporary 'task-and-finish' basis to allow councillors and staff to work on the detail of tightly-defined problems and issues.

3) PROPOSED COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

- a) Members have reviewed the decision-making arrangements of a number of other town councils, and discussed the options for change informally. The proposed committee structure for VTC is, in summary, as follows:

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE: Council internal policies; budget monitoring (sends reports to council); governance; audit; insurances (except buildings), staffing; HR matters; health & safety; training; website; media; newsletter.

PLANNING COMMITTEE: Planning, licensing, neighbourhood plan, heritage, local history, responding to the draft IOWC strategic plan.

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE: Sustainability, biodiversity, park (except its buildings), trees, open spaces, allotments, orchard, beach cleaning, car parks, meteorology, highways issues, 31 bus, town centre (except business relations).

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE: Health & wellbeing; charities, community events, grants, tourism, supporting local business; arts & culture, putting green contract, fringe, beach safety, carnival, library service, youth service, Community Fund.

BUILDINGS MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE: Maintenance of all buildings and structures (including park buildings and electrical supply), public toilets, Salisbury Gardens, paddling pool, buildings insurances.

- b) The proposed full terms of reference for each committee are appended to this report.
- c) The existing Community Fund Committee will be retained as a sub-committee of the Business & Community Committee, pending a review of the future of the Fund and its governance.

4) CONSIDERATIONS

- d) Each committee will comprise five members, and the quorum will be three. The chair and members will be appointed as usual at the council's annual meeting.
- e) All committees will have published agendas and be open to the public (including other members of the council) to attend and participate (except, in case of the public, for confidential items of business).
- f) Committees will be able to form working groups of members and staff, if appropriate, to work on the detail of specific detailed issues, and report back with recommendations for decision by the parent committee.
- g) Individual committees will be responsible for their budgets and can spend within the budget headings set by the council. The Policy & Resources committee will have limited power to redeploy underspends between budget headings, but not to borrow or spend from reserves, or make significant changes to the budget, which will always require a council decision.

- h) The full council will remain responsible for setting the budget, receiving financial reports (from the policy & resources committee), making significant changes to the budget (and hence for all significant new initiatives), deciding all member matters including appointments to committees, deciding the Standing Orders, Strategic Plan, Scheme of Delegations and Financial Regulations, for receiving reports (e.g. from IWALC) and presentations, and for wide-ranging discussions of strategic issues facing the town and parish.
- i) Committees will be able to arrange their meeting schedules, but the expectation is that they diary five during the year, in between council meetings (for example, in January, March, June/July, September & November). Under the current structure, some of the working groups have met more frequently, and it is not expected that the new structure will increase the overall number of meetings held across a year.
- j) There are no financial implications arising from this report. The current working group meetings are attended by staff and have agendas and notes; the only change under the new structure is that these will be published on the Council's website, and public notice will need to be given of committee meetings in the usual way.

5) RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Members are recommended to agree to replace all existing committees and working groups with the proposed committees as set out above, as 'standing committees' under Standing Orders, to take effect after this year's annual meeting on 20 May.
- b) Members are recommended to agree that the future committees will have Terms of Reference as appended to this report.
- c) Members are invited to note that the members and chairs of each committee will be appointed for the 2024/5 municipal year at the annual meeting.
- d) The Acting Town Clerk is asked to review how her staff will support the new committees, during the interim period before a substantive Town Clerk is in post.
- e) Members are recommended to agree that, under Standing Order 6v, the public will be entitled to participate in all future committee meetings (unless their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business, or for other special reasons).
- f) The future Policy & Resources Committee is asked to conduct a review of Standing Orders, to consider ways to improve the arrangements for public participation, to ensure that the Orders are fully compatible with the new decision-making structure, and to propose any recommended changes to a future meeting of the full council for decision.
- g) Members are asked to agree that the current Community Fund Committee will be reformed, with the same Terms of Reference, as a sub-committee of the future Business & Community Committee, with that committee asked to review the future and governance of the Community Fund and to recommend to the council whether this sub-committee be retained or not.

APPENDIX: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF COMMITTEES

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

General

The Committee is a Standing Committee governed by the Standing Orders and by regulations. The Town Council will appoint the Committee and determine its composition, quorum, role and functions. The Terms of Reference should be read in conjunction with the Town Council's adopted Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

Composition

- a) The Committee will comprise five councillors.
- b) The Committee's Chair will be appointed annually by the Town Council.
- c) The quorum of the Committee will be three members.

Authority

The Committee:

- a) may expend funds within the budgets agreed by the council to fulfil its terms of reference (but not move funds between budgets, other than as set out below);
- b) may make recommendations to the Council;
- c) may establish subcommittees and/or working groups that report to the Committee;
- d) is empowered to consult, insofar as it might consider necessary or desirable, any other committee of the Council or with any other Council or outside body or person;
- e) may decide any specific such matters that are delegated to it by the Council from time to time.

Role and Functions

The Committee will meet as and when requirements dictate and at least five times each council year (typically in January, March, June or July, September and November), and have the following role and functions:

- a) To review with the Town Clerk and Responsible Finance Office and recommend to the full Council its Strategic Plan, annual budget, Scheme of Delegations and Financial Regulations;
- b) To draft, review, monitor and revise policies regarding councillors (including the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders) to be recommended to the Town Council for decision, and to be responsible for general policies not falling entirely within the remit of another committee, including those for HR, procurement, data protection, risk register, emergency planning, complaints procedure, and the publication scheme;
- c) To monitor the budgets and financial position of the Council, including the level of reserves, reviewing bi-monthly financial reports prior to their submission to each meeting of the full Council, and to be able to vire up to £1,000 between any budget lines of the council, provided this will not create an overspend (but not to spend the Council's reserves, which requires a council decision);
- d) To be responsible for arranging and oversight of the annual audit, and for any insurances required by the Council, other than those for its buildings;
- e) To make representations and/or recommendations to the Council concerning member training, and to undertake training of its own members and/or seek professional external advice as necessary to support its role;

- f) To review the staffing structure, job descriptions and person specifications with the Town Clerk to best meet the Council's responsibilities and workload;
- g) To review as necessary with the Town Clerk the staff contracts, salary scales and associated terms and conditions and to receive any representations from staff members or their union representatives, determining pay and conditions for administrative and or project staff, and recommending to the Council for decision those for the Town Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer;
- h) To agree and implement appropriate recruitment and selection processes and to confirm appointments, but with those appointments for the Proper Officer & Responsible Finance Officer recommended to and formally confirmed by the Council;
- i) To review staff working conditions with the Town Clerk; including wellbeing and health and safety at work, ensuring that the Council complies with employment law and follows best practice, and to review annually in January all health and safety incidents recorded within the previous year;
- j) To monitor and review if required the exercise of the Clerk's delegated powers to manage staff, including annual performance & development reviews and staff training programmes, and staff requests for training for personal development or health and safety;
- k) To support and oversee together with the Mayor and the Chair of the Committee the Clerk's personal appraisal aims and objectives, to be agreed annually, and to monitor the leave arrangements of the Town Clerk, with the Mayor or Chair authorising these in a timely fashion;
- l) To hold delegated powers to deal with all personnel, employment and recruitment issues, with oversight of any process leading to staff redundancy or dismissal, and responsibility for the Council's Discipline and Grievance procedures including appointing investigators, hearing and appeals subcommittees, or a trained mediator if required for mediation, conciliation or arbitration;
- m) To lead on matters concerning communications including the Council's website, press relations, social media, and newsletter (the latter to be cleared with the Town Clerk and councillors before issue);
- n) To be responsible for decisions delegated to it by the full Council that need to be taken in between council meetings and do not fall within the terms of reference of any other committee, and for receiving reports from the Town Clerk of urgent actions that have been made by officers under section four of the Council's Scheme of Delegations.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

General

The Committee is a Standing Committee governed by the Standing Orders and by regulations. The Town Council will appoint the Committee and determine its composition, quorum, role and functions. The Terms of Reference should be read in conjunction with the Town Council's adopted Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

Composition

- a) The Committee will comprise five councillors.
- b) The Committee's Chair will be appointed annually by the Town Council.
- c) The quorum of the Committee will be three members.

Authority

The Committee:

- a) may expend funds within the budgets agreed by the council to fulfil its terms of reference (but not move funds between budgets);
- b) may make recommendations to the Council;
- c) may establish subcommittees and/or working groups that report to the Committee;
- d) is empowered to consult, insofar as it might consider necessary or desirable, any other committee of the Council or with any other Council or outside body or person;
- e) may decide any specific such matters that are delegated to it by the Council from time to time.

Role and Functions

The Committee will meet as and when requirements dictate, typically monthly depending on the level of planning applications about which the council is consulted, and have the following role and functions:

- a) To make representations to the Local Planning Authority on any planning application referred to the Town Council, and on any other planning or licensing matters that affect the town, including tree orders, enforcement matters, and planning appeals. The Committee may refer an application or other planning matter of significant importance to the town for discussion by the full council;
- b) To allow members of the public to address the Committee about planning applications and other items on the agenda, and to agree its procedures for doing so subject to the requirements of Section Four of the Town Council's Standing Orders;
- c) To lead on the development and review, and to make recommendations in relation to the approval or otherwise, of any neighbourhood development plan or other strategy proposals under planning legislation affecting the town;
- d) To make recommendations on the involvement of the Town Council in the discharge of planning functions, in relation to any representations between the Council and the Local Planning Authority;
- e) To lead on matters concerning conservation areas, listed buildings, heritage and local history;
- f) To lead on and recommend to the council its response to Isle of Wight consultations on its Island Plan, Core Strategy, Coastal Management Strategy, and any other consultations that do not fall entirely within the terms of reference of another committee.

NOTE: The Town Council is not the Local Planning Authority, and therefore the Committee does not have the power to refuse or allow planning applications. The Committee, on behalf of the Town Council, is a statutory consultee in the planning process

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

General

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- e) may decide any specific such matters that are delegated to it by the Council from time to time.

Role and Functions

The Committee will meet as and when requirements dictate and at least five times each council year (typically in January, March, June or July, September and November), and have the following role and functions:

- a) To discuss and suggest and seek to implement or assist with community initiatives for local residents that will help biodiversity, lower greenhouse gas emissions, educate and inform within its scope of activity, and build strong community and environmental resilience;
- b) To share and collaborate with other town and parish councils, community groups and individuals on community environmental and transport projects. and be open to such collaboration;
- c) To engage with residents by use of Peoples Assemblies or other inclusive methods of outreach, and through the council's regular communication channels, to gain understandings of residents needs and assist with improving the environment;
- d) To lead on matters concerning Ventnor Park (including strategy, the weather station and tree works, but excluding the toilets, maintenance of existing buildings and the gym, and management of the putting green contract) and other council-owned or managed open spaces within the parish including grounds maintenance, Boniface Fields, management of the allotments, the community orchard, Ventnor beach (excluding beach safety), and floral Ventnor;
- e) To lead on local transport matters including management of the council's own car parks, and management of the 31-bus route;
- f) To lead on matters concerning the environment and transport arrangements for Ventnor Town Centre, excluding relations with local businesses;
- g) To make representations to the Isle of Wight Council on public and road transport, parking and street cleaning matters.

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

General

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Role and Functions

The Committee will meet as and when requirements dictate and at least five times each council year (typically in January, March, June or July, September and November), and have the following role and functions:

- a) To lead on matters concerning relations and joint working with local community groups, charities and other local organisations operating within the parish;
- b) To lead on matters and policy concerning relations with and support for the local business community, including the economic vibrancy and sustainability of the town centre and Esplanade, and management of the putting green contract;
- c) To lead on matters concerning tourism and the town's visitor strategy and offer, including beach safety;
- d) To lead on matters concerning health and wellbeing, including the Wellbeing Café;
- e) To lead on matters concerning arts and culture within the parish, and for library and youth services;
- f) To be responsible for (working with, supporting or enabling local organisations as appropriate) community events including Ventnor Day, Ventnor Carnival, and Ventnor Fringe;
- g) To oversee management of the Council's Community Fund, and any other grants to local voluntary organisations;
- h) To oversee the use and hire of the Green Room (but not its maintenance).

BUILDINGS MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE

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Role and Functions

The Committee will meet as and when requirements dictate and at least five times each council year (typically in January, March, June or July, September and November), and have the following role and functions:

- a) To be responsible for the operational management, maintenance and cleaning of the Town Council's freehold and leasehold physical buildings, including Salisbury Gardens, all public toilets, the paddling pool, Ventnor Central, the first aid hut, the existing park buildings (kiosk, bandstand & gardeners' store, and the electrical supply), and maintenance of the Outfit gym;
- b) To review and fulfil the legal and insurance responsibilities that come with these physical assets, including making appropriate risk, fire, utility and health inspections and assessments, and maintaining all alarms, CCTV, and signage;
- c) To review and recommend to a meeting of the full Council the levels of rents and charges to be made for occupation of (or use of, or access to) the Council's buildings;
- d) To explore options for future management of the Town Council's buildings and make recommendations to meetings of the Town Council accordingly, overseeing the management of any buildings projects arising from Council decisions.