



REVIEW OF COUNCIL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE & MEETING FREQUENCY

POLICY & RESOURCES
COMMITTEE

PAPER A

24 SEPTEMBER 2025

In Spring/Summer 2024, Ventnor Town Council adopted a revised governance structure, moving from monthly full council meetings to a bi-monthly schedule, with committee meetings held in between. This change was introduced with the understanding that it would be reviewed after a year.

Now circa 16 months into the adoption - there is broad recognition - through both informal observations and conversations among councillors and staff - that the current structure may benefit from a review. These discussions have highlighted areas where the new arrangement has had unintended operational impacts.

The Town Clerk met with the mayor (also Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee) on 6 August 2025 to discuss the potential review of committee meeting structure and frequency in their 1:1 meeting. The mayor, who is currently on annual leave, provided his suggestions prior to his leave. These suggestions are included as a starting point for the Committee's consideration.

1. **Buildings & Maintenance** and **Environment & Transport** to be amalgamated; meeting every 2–3 months.
2. **Policy & Resources**: to meet monthly.
3. **Business & Community**: to meet quarterly.
4. **Planning**: to meet on an ad hoc basis.

No. DETAIL

1) AIM, KEY LEARNINGS AND SECTOR GUIDANCE

The revised structure aimed to improve efficiency and distribute decision-making. However, several practical challenges have emerged:

- a) **Staff workload**: The increased number of meetings and associated administrative tasks have placed significant pressure on council staff.
- b) **Decision-making timelines**: Items often require multiple committee discussions before reaching full council, which can delay outcomes.
- c) **Duplication and clarity**: Overlapping responsibilities between committees have occasionally led to duplicated efforts and confusion over delegated authority.
- d) Guidance from the **National Association of Local Councils (NALC)** and the **Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)** supports regular reviews of governance structures to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Both organisations emphasise the importance of clear delegation, manageable workloads, and timely decision-making as hallmarks of good practice.

2) CONSIDERATIONS

The Council's Standing Orders (adopted May 2025) provide clear authority and flexibility for the Council to review and amend its committee structure and meeting schedule. Specifically:

- a) **Committee Structure:**
The Council may create, merge, or dissolve committees as necessary, and set their terms of reference and frequency of meetings (Standing Order 6). This includes the power to amalgamate committees and adjust how often they meet.
- b) **Meeting Frequency:**
The Council can determine the frequency of both full council and committee meetings, provided statutory minimums are met (at least three ordinary council meetings per year) and quorum and notice requirements are observed (Standing Orders 3, 6, and 7).
- c) **Decision-Making Process:**
Any changes to committee arrangements must be resolved by the full council. If amendments to the standing orders themselves are required, these must be made by special motion with appropriate written notice (Standing Order 28).
- d) **Transparency and Public Access:**
All meetings must continue to comply with public notice and access requirements.

In summary, a proposed review and potential revision of the committee structure and meeting frequency are fully supported by the current Standing Orders, provided that all changes are made by resolution of the full council and proper procedures are followed.

Informal Member Discussion:

At a recent informal meeting of all members on 04/09, councillors expressed a wish to discuss the committee structure review informally before any formal decision is made, in line with NALC and SLCC guidance. This paper does not propose any immediate changes, but simply recommends that Full Council agrees to undertake a review and determines the next steps. This approach ensures that all members have the opportunity to contribute to the process, without being committed to any specific course of action at this stage, and allows them to undertake any necessary informal discussion.

3) PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE

This review paper is presented to the Policy & Resources Committee in accordance with its terms of reference, which empower the Committee to review governance arrangements and make recommendations to Full Council. The mayor, as Chair of this Committee, provided his suggestions for the review prior to commencing annual leave; these are included as a starting point for discussion and do not represent a formal decision.

Any changes to committee structure or meeting frequency must be approved by Full Council, as required by Standing Orders. This process ensures transparency, proper scrutiny, and collective decision-making, with all members having the opportunity to contribute to and approve any changes.

4) RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that Ventnor Town Council formally undertakes a review of its committee structure and meeting frequency, with the following objectives:

- a) **Evaluate the effectiveness** of the current structure in supporting timely and efficient decision-making.

- b) **Assess staff capacity** and the sustainability of the current meeting schedule.
- c) **Clarify roles and delegation** to reduce duplication and improve transparency.
- d) **Consider all alternative models**, including a return to monthly full council meetings with streamlined committee functions.
- e) **Engage councillors and staff** in the review process to ensure a balanced and informed outcome.

It is proposed that this review is supported by the Policy & Resources Committee and taken to the next Full Council meeting for assessment by all members, where the recommendation will be to support a review and agree next steps.
