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Meeting: Full Town Council, Item11.11

Date: 16th March 2021

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Subject: Meetings of the Council: To include and Annual Parish Meeting, Covid-19 restrictions and resuming face to face meetings

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To agree If the council holds or postpones the Annual Parish Meeting
- 1.2 To consider the return to face to face meetings and the Implications
- 1.3 To consider bringing forward the Annual Council meeting.

2.0 Annual Parish Meeting

- 2.1 It Is a requirement, as laid down in the Local Government Act 1972, that there is an Annual Parish Meeting (otherwise known as an Annual Assembly) between 1st March and 1st June each year. This is not a meeting of the council, but one called by the Chairman, and to which the electorate are invited to and can ask questions. It Is traditionally used for public participation, when community groups and agency representatives are Invited to give an update.
- 2.2 Due to the pandemic a new piece of temporary legislation (The Local Authorities (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020) enabled council meetings to be held on virtual platforms. The same regulations removed the need to hold an Annual Parish Meeting while the regulations were in force. The regulations cease on 7th May 2021. The regulations have yet to be revised or extended.

- 2.3 SMTC cancelled Its 2020 Annual Assembly meeting. The meeting for 2021 is scheduled for Tuesday 27th April at 6.30pm.
- 2.4 Therefore, Councillors are requested to consider the delay of the Annual Assembly either to a time later In the year when face to face meetings can resume. Alternatively, the council may wish to proceed with the meeting on Zoom. If that Is the Intention, the suggestion Is that representatives from 4 community groups are Invited to give updates: Heritage Trail, Snow Drop Festival, and 2 others at the suggestion of councillors.

3.0 Returning to Face to Face meetings

- 3.1 As stated above, the regulations allowed councils to meet virtually. That permission ceases on 7th May 2021. However, the current regulations prevent face to face meetings. NALC Is pressing government to urgently revise the regulations, but there remains uncertainty. NALC proposes that urgent matters are brought forward to a meeting in April. The council's Annual Council Meeting has been arranged for 18th May (An annual council meeting must be held in the month of May) for the purpose of nominating a new Chair, Vice Chair and committee membership. However, Council may wish to bring the annual council meeting forward in order to complete It before 7th May. Alternatively, it might wish to delay the meeting until the regulations are revised that allow face to face meetings
- 3.2 Using the calendar of meetings that has been adopted there are 11 council and committee meetings in the months of May, June and July that could potentially be Impacted. If the council is unable to legally meet It will need to revert to the scheme of delegation that was adopted in April 2020 when the pandemic first Impacted the council business. And It will need to wait until the covid regulations are revised that are based on face to face public meetings, In a safe environment.
- 3.3 At the same time we rely on the meeting facilities offered by Mendip District Council. The Council Chamber/Committee room and corridors are currently In use as a vaccination centre and we might not be able to resume meetings anyway, as meetings will be subject to completing a satisfactory risk assessment and based on the conditions Imposed by the building custodian: We might be limited In the numbers that can attend and will probably need to be completely paperless. In addition, we must also consider those who might not wish to return to face to face meeting due to personal Issues. Therefore, councillors need to be aware that business might have to be suspended while we adjust to the return to normal

4.0 Financial Information

4.1 There are no financial Implications

5.0 Environmental Implications

5.1 There are no environmental Implications

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 To consider the postponement of the Annual Parish Meeting to a later date In 2021, or to cancel for this year and to hold In 2022, or to consider holding it as planned on 27th April 2021.

6.2 To be aware that at the time of writing virtual meetings must cease on 7th May 2021.

6.3 To consider If the council wishes to bring the Annual Council Meeting forward from 18th May to Tuesday 4th May (to replace People and Promotion Committee).

6.4 If 6.3 is agreed and regulations do not allow for zoom meetings to continue, to Instigate the scheme of delegation and postpone all planned council and committee meetings from 8th May until such time that the council Is able to resume council meetings safely.