

REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2017

The Local Government Act 1972 (LGA), Schedule 12, paragraph 14 sets out requirements for the dates and times for the Annual Town Meeting

14(1): *The parish meeting of a parish shall assemble annually on some day between 1st March and 1st June, both inclusive, in every year.*

14(4): *The proceedings at a parish meeting shall not commence earlier than 6 o'clock in the evening.*

For a number of years the Annual Town Meeting has not been in compliance, usually being held on a Saturday afternoon. Following the 2016 ATM it was agreed that an alternative format should be developed to improve attendance and encourage community participation.

CHANGES FOR 2017

FTC agreed to:

- continue with a Saturday afternoon meeting
- a date most likely to improve attendance
- hold it in a more central location – the Parish Hall
- invite residents to put forward suggestions for the ATM
- have an informal session before the meeting to focused on the work of the committees
- have a short agenda focused on the annual report and accounts
- invite local groups to give presentations
- invite residents to raise issues of interest/concern

The proposed changes were discussed several times at P&P during 2017 and endorsed by full council. While most of these changes were straightforward, setting the date proved the most problematical. The criteria for choosing the date were based on the availability of the end of year accounts and annual report; the two bank holidays in May, and the availability of the Parish Hall on a Saturday.

On 13 March, being mindful of the dates set in the LGA, the Town Clerk and Chair asked a CHALC officer if there were any adverse implications if the meeting was held later. The advice was that there were no sanctions for missing the dates and that other Councils hold their ATMs to meet local needs.

On 19 April the general election was called for 8th June, further complicating the choice of an acceptable date because of potential conflict with 'purdah' guidelines.

As FTC had, for a number of years, chosen not to comply with the LGA, it was not considered an issue to call the ATM for the 1st July - the first available date for the Parish Hall. The date and time of the ATM was endorsed by full council.

REVIEW FINDINGS

The P&P Committee's aim in developing the proposals for the 2017 ATM was to ensure a date, time, format, location and agenda that would encourage greater attendance and participation.

FTC had previously chosen not to comply with the LGA for a number of years, so an explicit reminder was not considered necessary. Additionally, relevant information on the holding an Annual Town Meeting had been provided to all Councillors [page 32 of The Good Councillor's Guide].

The advice given by CHALC is endorsed in two important reference documents.

House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 04827, 15 May 2015,

Para 1.2

The Local Government Act 1972 requires a parish meeting to take place in all parishes. A parish meeting is a distinct legal entity from a parish council... * Where a parish council exists, the parish meeting must still take place, once a year between 1 March and 1 June.

*** Footnote 5**

"In practice this obligation may be disregarded, and there are few sanctions available if a parish meeting is not held."

Arnold-Baker on Local Council Administration (The Town Clerk's Handbook)

10.3 'There is no effective method of enforcing these rules'.

All Councillors had sufficient opportunity to object to the proposed arrangements.
The residents overwhelmingly voted to continue with the meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Council accepts that, in the prevailing circumstances, the P&P Committee acted in the best interests of the residents.
2. The date and time has not affected the outcome of the meeting.
2. All future ATMs shall be called after 6pm on a day in the first week of March.