

## **POLICY, FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**25<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2020**

### **COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

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#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Clerk was tasked by the Chairman and Vice Chair to consider the governance structure of the Council and suggest improvements for both councillors and the community and to identify any cost savings that could be made.

To prepare for this report the Clerk has observed the Council system for the last 6 months and two publications have been sourced and considered. It must be noted that both of these documents are compiled for principal councils however they contain helpful reminders regarding terms of reference and delegations:

- 1.1 “Rethinking governance: Practical steps for councils considering changes to their governance arrangements.” (Local Government Association/ Centre for Public Scrutiny (<https://www.cfps.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking-Governance.pdf>))
- 1.2 “Musical chairs: Practical issues for local authorities in moving to a committee system.” (Centre for Public Scrutiny - <https://www.cfps.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/Musical-Chairs.pdf>)

#### **2.0 CURRENT STRUCTURE**

The current structure was introduced many years previously and the committees have encompassed new roles according to need. Unusually the Committees have no set numbers for membership and there are no arrangements in place to ensure appropriate levels of councillor membership on all committees and sub committees aside from the Neighbourhood Planning Sub Committee.

##### **2.1 Council**

Meets six times a year and all Committees report back. The feedback received is that this is a ‘dry’ meeting with little decision making and is the one that the community attend to discover that the majority of discussion and decision has occurred at the committee meetings. The minute taking of the information sharing at the Council is a duplication of the Committee meetings and is then only shared with those present and those that read the minutes. The Council is facilitated and supported by the Clerk who takes the minutes.

- 2.1.1 Suggested improvements – move more decision making to Council and increase meetings. Initiate information sharing arrangements lead by councillors to construct a weekly newsletter that can be shared on line and on noticeboards.

##### **2.2 Policy, Finance and General Purposes Committee**

This Committee currently consists of 8 councillors and is facilitated and supported by the Clerk. It meets six times a year and reports back to Council. It undertakes an overview of finance across the council and deals with general council governance and operations. It currently oversees the provision of the office accommodation.

2.2.1 The terms of reference of PF and GP have been sourced from records and are listed as 'Delegated Powers':

- a) To spend up to its allocated budget each year*
- b) To regulate, manage and control the finance and resources of the Parish Council, including the recommendation to Parish Council of the annual budgets and precept within the Council's Financial Regulations*
- c) To review the expenditure on capital schemes and all budgets, including the setting of (and changes to) the Earmarked Reserves;*
- d) To provide guidance to Committees and Council on overall levels of income and expenditure;*
- e) To ensure that an adequate and effective system of internal control is in place to secure the integrity of finances and any other information;*
- f) To ensure the adequacy of all insurances relating to council property, including periodic review of the items of insured property as listed; This to include the authority to make relevant changes to the list, and for the 'writing off/disposal of' of items no longer required for council use. To take responsibility for all claims in respect of insurance policies.*
- g) To ensure the preservation of probity and good financial and other practices within the Council;*
- h) To consider and take action on all reports arising from both internal and external auditors and to report to the Parish Council*
- i) To take steps to review, identify and manage key risks facing the Council, and to decide upon appropriate measures to avoid, reduce or control those risks or their consequences;*
- j) To provide regular monitoring reports to the relevant Committees on levels of income and expenditure in accordance with authorised budgets. The Committee has ultimate responsibility to ensure financial balance and probity of the Parish Council;*
- k) To consider and where appropriate, authorise any requests for supplementary expenditure from spending committees;*
- l) The Committee is authorised to establish sub-committees and working groups, and to appoint advisors as and when necessary to assist in its work*
- (e) (l) to review the internal audit process and appoint internal auditor.*
- m) To take responsibility for the investments and borrowings of the Council.*
- n) To write off irrecoverable debts.*
- o) To authorise delegated powers to officers.*
- p) Responsible for Health and Safety on all premises.*
- q) To review Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and make recommendations to full Council for any changes.*
- r) To review and update all policies on an annual basis.*
- Responsible for all decisions and Policy and strategic matters including Donations/grants to other organisations, subscriptions, training for staff and councillors, purchase of books and papers, administration, office premises, professional services and fees.*

- 2.2.2 Suggested improvements – an overview of the financial arrangements that enables all councillors to have a voice and a vote could be considered more engaging. Policy, governance, financial arrangements and audit would sit well under the Council with the internal audit arrangements structure amended to encompass a quarterly finance overview, outturn options, and budget planning assistance. A new committee with this role could undertake the important role of strategic financial planning that would run alongside the strategies of the committees undertaking improvement and development work

## **2.3 Amenities Committee**

This is a very busy committee of 9 councillors and with an overview of all buildings (except the office), open space and play areas. It is the committee that has the resources with which to raise revenue. Like Policy, Finance and General Purposes Committee it meets 6 times a year and is facilitated and supported by the Assistant Clerk, and also supported by the Clerk as required.

- 2.3.1 The terms of reference of the Amenities Committee have been sourced from records and are listed as 'Delegated Powers':

- a) The Committee will be able to spend up to the Budget, other requests will be forwarded to Policy, Finance and General Purposes Committee;*
- b) To monitor the financial performance of the Amenities and Sports Pavilion budgets against estimates and to set a budget for approval by the Policy, Finance and General Purposes Committee each year*
- c) All spending and decisions relating to:  
Sports Buildings, Recreation Grounds, Playgrounds, Allotments  
Mud Wharves Nature Reserve  
Cottage in the Woods footpath  
Burial Ground/Closed Churchyard  
St Leonard's Mound, Land at Swan Road, Jubilee Pavilion*
- d) To make all decisions regarding policy and strategic matters relating to all of the above*
- e) To formulate a budget for revenue expenditure/capital for the next financial year, ready to recommend to Resources November meeting;*
- f) To propose, cost, obtain estimates for capital works subject to the permission of council;*
- g) To set rents and fees for persons or groups using the facilities provided by the Parish Council;*
- h) To exercise the delegated powers and duties of the Council with respect to the provision, care and development of:-  
All buildings (except administrative offices), open spaces, allotment and horticultural areas whether owned, leased or managed by the Council;*
- i) To exercise the delegated powers and duties of the Council with respect to the provision, care and development of:  
Sporting, cultural and recreational facilities provided by the Council and to review the local provision of such facilities;*
- j) To submit to Council proposals for new and improved services;*
- k) The Committee is authorised to establish sub-committees and working groups, and to appoint advisors as and when necessary to assist in its work.*

- 2.3.2 Suggested improvements – this committee has an excess of work and is the committee with the most challenges and defects. Consideration should be given to operating the buildings under Trust arrangements if the revenue cannot be increased. It can be seen by the list that this committee is required to report proposed budget to Policy, Finance and General Purposes that then reports to Council. Shortening the decision making will result in savings and improved reaction times for the Council

## **2.4 Highways and Infrastructure Committee**

This is a committee of 10 councillors that meets 4 times a year and is facilitated and supported by the Administrator, and also supported by the Clerk as required. It is a busy Committee outside of meetings.

- 2.4.1 The terms of reference of the Highways and Infrastructure Committee have been sourced from records and are listed as 'Delegated Powers':

- a) The Committee will be able to spend up to the Budget, other requests will be forwarded to Policy, Finance and General Purposes Committee;*
- b) To monitor the financial performance of the Highways & Partnerships budgets against estimates and to set a budget for approval by the Policy, Finance and General Purposes Committee each year.*
- c) All decisions relating to :  
Road safety and highways works e.g. HGV licences, road signs, road closures, village gates, pedestrian crossings, speed restrictions, parking restrictions, weight restrictions, traffic calming, and local transport, highway trees, cycleways, bus shelters, seats, bins notice boards and Parish gates Infrastructure eg consultation responses, transport assessments*
- d) All spending and decisions relating to Parish Street Lighting.*
- e) To make all decisions regarding policy and strategic matters relating to all of the above*
- f) To make all decisions with regard to matters arising from the District and County Councils*
- g) To consider and develop action plans as necessary with regard to any third party infrastructure projects affecting the Parish.*
- h) To formulate a budget for revenue expenditure/capital for the next financial year, ready to recommend to Policy, Finance and General Purposes Committee November Meeting;*
- i) The Committee is authorised to establish sub-committees and working groups, and to appoint advisers as and when necessary to assist in its work.*
- j) To liaise with partner authorities regarding services that they provide for us or that we are providing on their behalf.*

- 2.4.2 Suggested Improvements - In a similar manner to the Amenities Committee there is an hierarchical structure that is followed for many matters and reducing the length of time for decisions to be made will result in savings. This Committee has the most widespread impact on the community and covers some of the most emotive topics. It is currently considered as under resourced and has vague boundaries with Amenities Committee

## **2.5 Planning Committee**

The Planning Committee currently consists of 10 councillors and meets monthly. It is a very busy Committee and responds to national, regional and local consultations. It is administered and supported by the Administrator.

2.5.1 The terms of reference of the Planning Committee have been sourced from records and are listed as 'delegated powers':

- i) To consider and respond to all applications for planning permission and planning appeals referred to Parish Council by Local Planning Authorities;*
- ii) To consider and comment on all matters relating to Listed Building Consents, Buildings of Special Architectural Interest, Historic Buildings and the Conservation Area;*
- iii) To identify, comment upon and refer to the relevant authorities any matters considered to be in breach of planning permission;*
- iv) To consider and comment on all planning matters relating to the Parish of Iver and advise the Parish Council as necessary;*
- v) To comment upon and monitor Tree Preservation Orders and to seek approval for further TPOs if deemed necessary;*
- vi) To respond to all relevant consultation documents relating to planning and associated matters;*
- vii) To approve any planning application that the Parish Council is considering making*
- viii) The Committee is authorised to establish sub-committees and working groups, and to appoint advisers as and when necessary to assist in its work.*
- ix) To consider and respond to all SBDC Local Plan matters*
- x) To develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the Ivers Parish Council*

2.5.2 Suggested Improvements - none

## **2.6 HR Sub Committee**

This committee currently consists of 8 councillors and meets as required.

2.6.1 The 'delegated powers' are contradictory and are listed below:

- a) The level of staffing resources required by the Council will initially be dealt with as a recommendation only, from each service committee through to the Policy, Finance & General Purposes Committee. Human Resources Sub-Committee will deal with matters relating to staff appraisal, terms and conditions of employment etc. Salaries may be discussed and recommendations made to PF&GP;*
- b) To ensure the Council complies with all legislative requirements relating to the employment of staff;*
- c) To make all decisions regarding human resources issues; recruitment and appointment of staff, salaries, appraisals, pensions, disciplinary and grievance procedures etc.*

2.6.2 Suggested Improvements – councillor training would sit well with this work and following recent case law it would be advisable that this committee deals with the initial processes regarding complaints against councillors and referrals to the monitoring officer. Realigning the committee with a direct report to Council and with

delegated power to set roles, job descriptions and salary budgets will provide a 'flatter' and more reactive structure. The terms of reference would benefit from a review.

### **3 REVIEWED STRUCTURE**

Savings will be achieved through 'flatter' structures and the reduction of information sharing through minuted meetings. Two possible structures could assist councillors to improve outcomes for the community at the same time as reducing costs and improving information provision to other councillors and the community. These structures are:

**3.1 Retain a Council that meets 11 times a year and reconfigure the Committees to:**

- 3.1.1 Facilities and Events Committee to oversee all buildings and events (6 times a year minimum facilitated by the Assistant Clerk)
- 3.1.2 Open Space and Highways Committee to oversee recreation grounds, churchyards and burial ground, play areas, street furniture and lighting, all open space (6 times a year facilitated by the Deputy Clerk)
- 3.1.3 Planning Committee (monthly facilitated by the Business Administrator)
- 3.1.4 Personnel and Training Committee (as required facilitated by the Clerk)
- 3.1.5 Finance and Audit Committee (4 times a year facilitated by the Clerk)
- 3.1.6 Neighbourhood Planning Sub Committee that reports to Planning Committee (facilitated by the Clerk)
- 3.1.7 Council and Committees under this structure to focus on scrutiny, developments and decision making.
- 3.1.8 Council to receive budgetary advice and recommendations from Finance and Audit Committee

**3.2 Remove all committees except for a Planning Committee, Finance and Audit Committee and a Personnel Committee and channel all business through the Council that would meet on a monthly basis. Background work to be undertaken through working groups that could include community members.**

### **4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

When considering the current workload of the Council it is clear that there is much work for Councillors, the Council and the Committees. On that basis a monthly Council meeting set out in 3.2 might not be able to cope; 3.2 is also a heavier call on officer resource where it might be required for all to attend the same meeting.

Option 3.1 offers streamlining and a sharing of the workload of the current Amenities Committee. It moves all buildings and potential for revenue raising to one Committee and although there might be occasions when the clerks other than the facilitator could be required to attend it will reduce the call on officer resources across the year.

It is recommended that councillors:

- 4.1 Agree to consider a reviewed structure as set out in 3.1 and

- 4.2 Instruct the Clerk to draw up draft Terms of Reference for the Committees as listed for consideration at the next meeting and to focus on decision making rather than information sharing
- 4.3 Instruct the Clerk to draw up proposals for increased information sharing between councillors and with the community outside of the committee and council structure