

MEETING DATES 2021/22

DATE	TYPE OF MEETING	TIME
11th May 2021	Annual Town meeting	7.30pm
17th May 2021	Annual Council Meeting	7.30pm
18th May 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.30pm
	Environment and Recreation Committee	7.30pm
25th May 2021	Full Council	7.30pm
22nd June 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.30pm
	Policy and Resources Committee	7.30pm
29th June 2021	Council	7.30pm
13th July 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Environment and Recreation Committee	7.30pm
27th July 2021	Council	7.30pm
17th August 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Policy and Resources Committee	7.30pm
31st August 2021	Statutory Council	7.30pm
14th September 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Environment and Recreation Committee	7.30pm
28th September 2021	Council	7.30pm
12th October 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Policy and Resources Committee	7.30pm
26th October 2021	Council	7.30pm
16th November 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Environment and Recreation Committee	7.30pm
30th November 2021	Statutory Council	7.30pm
7th December 2021	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Policy and Resources Committee	7.30pm
21st December 2021	Council	7.30pm
11th January 2022	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Environment and Recreation Committee	7.30pm
25th January 2022	Council	7.30pm
8th February 2022	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Policy and Resources Committee	7.30pm
22nd February 2022	Statutory Council	7.30pm
8th March 2022	Annual Town Meeting	6.30pm
15th March 2022	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Environment and Recreation Committee	7.30pm
29th March 2022	Council	7.30pm
12th April 2022	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Policy and Resources Committee	7.30pm
26th April 2022	Council	7.30pm
9th May 2022	Mayor Making	7.30pm
17th May 2022	Planning and Development Committee	6.45pm
	Environment and Recreation Committee	7.30pm
31st May 2022	Council	7.30pm

Civic Events

14th November 2021	Remembrance Day
To be confirmed	Civic Event to mark new Mayoral Year
12th September 2021	Civic Service
To be confirmed	Carol Concert

TEMPORARY CHANGES TO STATUS OF COMMITTEES AND DELEGATION ARRANGEMENTS

Annual Meeting

17th May 2021

PURPOSE

To agree temporary changes to status of committees.

BACKGROUND

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency legislation was enacted which confirmed the legality of Council and Committee meetings being held virtually, existing legislation having always been interpreted as requiring attendance in person. This emergency legislation expired on 7th May and the government have stated that any extension would require primary legislation, which cannot be accommodated within the planned parliamentary timetable. Councils have been advised to plan for returning to physical meetings after 7th May and guidance has been issued on how to manage those meetings.

After the election on 6th May the Council was legally required to hold its Annual Council Meeting within 2 weeks of new councillors taking office on 10th May. To facilitate this safely the Bede House is being used as an alternative venue.

On 25th March 2021 the Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, Luke Hall MP, wrote to councils in England confirming that emergency legislation regarding virtual council meetings will not be extended. Updated guidance has been issued on the safe use of council buildings, highlighting ways councils that can use existing powers to reduce the number of face-to-face meetings, and how to minimise the risk where these are necessary.

At the same time a call for evidence was launched, about how remote meetings have been used during the pandemic, to “inform any potential future legislation regarding their use beyond the coronavirus outbreak”. A response to the consultation was agreed by the Council at the April meeting.

A legal challenge to the government’s decision was brought in the High Court by Lawyers in Local Government, the Association of Democratic Services Officers and Hertfordshire County Council over the ability of councils in England to hold remote meetings. The case was heard on 21 April 2021 and has been dismissed.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have recognised that there is a case to be heard. Their view is that the Local Government Act 1972 should be interpreted as allowing for virtual meetings “as

the legislation was passed at a time when virtual meetings could not have been envisaged”.

As the legal challenge has failed it is now necessary to return to physical meetings after 7th May 2021. It is clear, however, that the risk of Covid-19 transmission is likely to continue during May and at least until 21st June – the earliest date in the government’s roadmap out of lockdown for the removal of all restrictions, so any physical meetings in the meantime, will need to be carefully risk assessed and managed.

Members of the public and press will be permitted to attend any physical meetings that are held, so provision will need to be made for attendance. To minimise demand for space, meetings are being livestreamed for anyone wanting to observe the meeting, but not needing to be physically present.

The government guidance suggests to Councils that they make “Use of your existing powers to delegate decision making to key individuals such as the Head of Paid Service to minimise the number of meetings you need to hold”. This comes with the caveat that “certain decisions cannot be delegated and require a decision by full council”. NALC have also provided guidance on this.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The relevant legislation is the [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#), which expire on 7 May 2021.

FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

There are additional costs involved in hiring alternative venues for meetings, as the Town Hall is not big enough to accommodate the Council and potential public whilst socially distanced. To facilitate this an extra member of staff will be required at face-to-face meetings. Extra equipment has been purchased to facilitate the livestreaming of the meetings.

RECOMMENDATION

The Council will be holding the Annual Meeting and the full Council meeting at the end of May face -to- face at the Bede House. In order to reduce the number of occasions that the Council need to meet face-to- face and therefore mitigate the risk of COVID transmission, it is recommended that from 17th May 2021 that temporary changes are made to the status of committees.

- Committees to meet remotely as advisory groups to support and advise the Clerk.
- The Clerk to take decisions under her extended delegated powers already agreed by Council in March 2021, taking into account the views of the advisory committees.