

Stinsford Parish Council – 8 July 2019

Future pattern of meetings - Report by the Clerk

Reason for report

Since the scheduled elections in May 2019, the Parish Council has comprised only three parish councillors, with four seats remaining vacant. In discussing how to attract potential co-optees to fill the vacant seats, the Parish Council agreed to revisit its pattern of meetings.

Background

In May 2015, the Parish Council resolved to move to a pattern of monthly meetings. Prior to this, meetings had been held on alternate months with 'reserve' meeting dates scheduled on the intervening months. However, due to a number of major projects and proposed projects within the parish, throughout 2014 and early 2015 meetings had been held every month so as to ensure timely consideration of applications and issues. It was therefore considered to move to a pattern of monthly meetings as standard; such meetings tend to be scheduled for the second Monday of the month.

In the past year, whilst there remain some major issues facing the parish, not least the DOR15 option for development north of Dorchester and the Kingston Maurward masterplan, meetings have been more focussed and shorter in length.

Options

1. Status quo – monthly meetings

Monthly meetings allow the Parish Council to be responsive to planning applications, consultations and issues as they arise.

Meetings can, of course, be cancelled if there is no business for the Parish Council to consider.

2. Eight meetings per year

A slight reduction in the number of meetings to eight per year would enable the Parish Council to make the major timetabled decisions in the usual manner. A suggested pattern would be as follows:

January (budget meeting)

March

May (annual meeting)

June (approval of annual accountability and governance return)

July

September

October

December

If it was decided to reduce the number of meetings, it would be sensible to schedule 'reserve' meetings on the other months should there be a need for the Parish Council to meet to consider any matters which were time critical.

3. Six meetings per year – alternate months

A move to meeting on alternate months would halve the number of scheduled meetings. A suggested pattern would be as follows:

January (budget meeting)

March

May (annual meeting and approval of annual accountability and governance return)

July

September

November

If it was decided to reduce the number of meetings, it would be sensible to schedule 'reserve' meetings on the other months should there be a need for the Parish Council to meet to consider any matters which were time critical.

Other considerations

A potential negative to the reduction in the number of scheduled meetings could be the length of the meetings themselves. In the past year, meetings have tended to last between 60 – 90 minutes. It is possible that fewer meetings could result in a greater workload at each meeting and therefore more lengthy meetings.

If the Parish Council is inclined to reduce the number of scheduled meetings, it may also wish to consider establishing a Planning Committee to which all parish councillors are appointed. This would allow meetings to be arranged which could focus solely on a planning application and not need the agenda to include the standing items required by Standing Orders for an agenda of the full Parish Council.

Recommendation

The Parish Council is asked to consider the options above and decide on its future pattern of meetings.

Kirsty Riglar
Clerk
July 2019