

Review of the Annual Meeting Process

Report to Policy and Resources Committee 6th January 2025

1. Introduction

This report outlines a proposal to improve the efficiency of the new civic year process. The recommendations aim to ensure responsible budget management and an open and transparent approach.

2. Mayor-Making Event Proposal

Current Practice:

An annual mayor-making ceremony is traditionally held at the Alexander Centre each year, incurring additional costs.

Proposed Change:

- **Mayor's Second, or Subsequent Term:** If the current mayor remains in position for a second or more, consecutive year, no separate mayor-making event will be held.
- **Budget Impact:** This will result in an estimated saving of **at least £2,000** in the next year's budget.
- **Event Timing:** If the mayor is to serve a second term, the re-election process should be completed by **February** to ensure sufficient preparation time and avoid last-minute arrangements.

Considerations:

- **Venue Availability:** The Alexander Centre has not been booked for the next year, and its availability may be uncertain.

3. Outside Body Appointments

Current Challenges:

The process of appointing members to outside bodies during the annual meeting gives a limited opportunity for councillors to fully understand the responsibilities and commitments associated with external roles.

Proposed Improvements:

- **Information:** A pack will be provided to all councillors with details, including the responsibilities, training requirements and frequency of meetings.

Considerations:

Members will have a better understanding of the commitment required for each position.

4. Proportional Representation for Committee Allocations

Many councils, composed of councillors who have declared an alliance with a political party, align their committees with the political balance. Research has been undertaken to see how other grouped councils manage this process, in particular Trowbridge, Corsham, Weymouth and Chippenham Town Councils were reviewed.

Proposed Change:

- **Pre-Meeting Discussions:** Each political group will consider their committee representatives in advance. A form will be sent to the largest group first for allocation of places then to the smaller groups in order.
- A similar structure can be put in place for outside bodies representatives, or alternatively, councillors could be asked to complete an expression of interest form individually.
- **Submission Process:** The finalised list of committee and outside body appointments will be submitted to the Town Clerk before the annual meeting.
- **Decision Process:** The proposed list of committee members will be agreed at the annual meeting.

Proposed PR Implementation:

- **Total Seats Calculated Proportionally:** Allocate committee seats based on the number of council members from each group.
- **Example Calculation:** If applied across 5 committees, each group's representation will align with their council proportion.

Summary:

Proportional representation across 5 committees (Active Travel, Community, Environment, Heritage and Policy) with 7 seats.

- **A group with 10 councillors:** 25 seats
- **A group with 3 councillors:** 8 seats
- **An individual ungrouped councillor:** 2 seats

Considerations:

Having an agreed procedure in place will ensure openness and transparency, particularly in the event of any by-elections during the 4-year term.

Standing Orders:

An addition to Standing Orders should read:

POLITICAL BALANCE Faversham Town Council is composed of Councillors who have declared their alliance with a political party, or who have stated that they are independent of a political party. Wherever possible composition of committees will be undertaken along political proportionality, other than the Staffing Committee.

Considerations:

- Within its membership, the Policy and Resources Committee should include the Mayor and Chairs and/or Vice Chairs of Active Travel, Community, Environment and Heritage Committees.
- The Staffing Committee should not be proportionally balanced, but continue to be made up of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Past Mayors as a priority. Although the Council, as a body, is the employer, the Mayor is the line manager responsible for undertaking the Clerk's appraisal.
- The Planning Committee is an extension of Full Council and therefore all Councillors are automatically members, unless they decline to take their seat. Such situations may include if they are members of Swale Borough Council's planning committee.

5. Proportional Representation for Working Group Allocations

Where working groups are set up by the Town Council, PR is recommended, or a representative from each Ward to be appointed/agreed by members of that Ward, by a majority vote.

Working Groups set up by Committees should be allocated from members of that Committee.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Key Recommendations:

1. Mayor-Making:

- Hold an annual mayor-making event **only** when a **new** mayor is elected or in an election year, with a budget saving of approximately £2,000
- Ensure the mayoral (re-)election process is completed by February.
- To note that no budget allocation has been made in the 2025/26 draft budget for a Mayor Making event

2. Committee Appointments:

- Committee seats to be allocated on a proportional representation basis.
- Require each group to finalise and submit their committee members to the Town Clerk prior to the annual meeting.

3. Outside Bodies

- Provide thorough details on the requirements of the role, ie frequency of meetings / timings / training requirements / very little commitment.
- Require each group to submit their representatives prior to the annual meeting for approval.

4. Standing Orders

- Update Standing Orders accordingly.

Louise Bareham
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20th December 2024