

WHITTLESFORD PARISH COUNCIL

4 June 2023

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Parish Council Standing Committees and Terms of Reference

Summary

1. To agree standing committees of the Parish Council and to ask standing committees to draft terms of reference and agree other matters, to be considered by a future meeting of the Council.
2. To appoint David Cunado as Chair of the Planning Committee and Philip James as Vice-Chair.

Background and Reason for Paper

At the annual meeting in May 2023 the Council appointed members to six standing committees*. They are:

- Allotment Committee (3 members)
- Planning Committee (4 members)
- Committee of Environment and Open Spaces (5 members)
- Committee of Highways and Road Safety (5 members)
- Committee of Speed Monitors and Data (5 members)
- Committee for Communication and Social Media (2 members)

The membership list for committees agreed in May 23 is set out in Appendix 1

The Standing Orders for the Council do not state any terms of reference for Council standing committees. In the recent past, standing committees have met infrequently, if they have met at all. Chairs of standing committees have sometimes not been appointed. The existing structure of standing committees is not optimal. There is clear scope for duplication (e.g. between the Highways and Speed Monitor committees) and the standing committee structure leaves gaps e.g. financial matters do not fall within the scope of any established committee. The number of members on each standing committee also varies and some committees (e.g. communication) are very small.

The structure of standing committees in Whittlesford should be rationalised and terms of reference for committees should be agreed.

(*The Hall Management Committee is also a committee of the Parish Council, but that Committee is appointed under a trust deed and operates under terms of reference agreed by the Parish Council. The Hall Management Committee is not included within the scope of

the proposals in this paper. Parish Council appointments to external bodies, such as the IWM and Lawn Trust also fall outside the scope of this paper).

Framework for Parish Council Committees

Parish Councils can appoint committees that are advisory only or committees that exercise delegated powers on behalf of the Council.

The most typical form of delegation is for a parish council to delegate decision making powers on planning applications to a planning committee of the council.

In Whittlesford's case, committees have not exercised delegated powers and so have been advisory committees.

Meetings of committees of parish councils, whether advisory or exercising delegated powers, are subject to rules on public access, so must take place in public with agendas published 3 days in advance etc.

Council committees can appoint sub-committees or 'task and finish' groups to undertake particular projects.

Active advisory committees help to concentrate the work of the full Council on discussing clear recommendations/decisions, with detailed work on particular issues having been carried out by the committee. This can help create an innovative, dynamic and effective council that serves the Parish. Active committees also spread the work of the council and allow councillors to develop particular skills and expertise.

Options for Consideration

Two options are set out below for reinvigorating Parish Council committees.

Option 1

The Parish Council can affirm the existing Committee structure and ask committees to draft clear terms of reference to be adopted by a future meeting of the Council.

Committees should also be asked to agree nominations for Chairs and Vice-Chairs, to be agreed at a future meeting of the Council.

Meeting dates for committees should be agreed.

If option 1 is chosen the Parish Council might want to consider if a new committee should be established to consider financial matters.

Option 2

The Council could agree a modified and standardised structure of standing committees along the following lines:

- A Planning Committee (responsible for making recommendations to full Council on planning applications in the Parish)
- A Highways and Road Safety Committee (responsible for e.g. : making recommendations on road safety issues in the Parish including LHI bids; overseeing PC maintained speed monitors in the Parish)
- An Environment and Open Spaces Committee (responsible for making recommendations in respect of e.g. : Parish environmental policies, parish open spaces etc)
- An Allotment and Cemetery Committee (responsible for making recommendations concerning Parish allotments and cemeteries)
- A Finance and General Purposes Committee (responsible for making recommendations on e.g.: the Council Budget, IT issues, governance issues, personnel and other issues referred by the Council).

This modified committee structure moves responsibility for speed monitors to the Highways and Road Safety Committee to provide a more unified structure, expands the remit of the Allotments Committee to include maintenance of Parish Cemeteries and creates a new Finance and General Purposes Committee to oversee financial matters and communication.

It is suggested that each standing committee under option 2 would usually have four or five members, but to allow flexibility standing orders should specify only a minimum of three members and a maximum of no more than five, including a Chair and Vice-Chair. With 11 PC members, each member could expect to serve on one or two committees.

Standing orders will need to specify a quorum for committee meetings, which has to be no fewer than three members.

Committees will be asked to draft clear terms of reference to be adopted by a future meeting of the Council.

Committees should also be asked to agree nominations for Chairs and Vice-Chairs, to be appointed at a future meeting of the Council.

Meeting dates for committees should be agreed. The frequency of committee meetings will vary according to the work of the committee. A planning committee would be likely to meet before each full Parish Council meeting. It is suggested that other committees should meet at least twice in each municipal year.

If option 2 is chosen the Council will need to make nominations to the new committees.

Planning Committee

Members of the Planning Committee met informally on 5th June and agreed to nominate David Cunado and Philip James to the positions of Chair and Vice-Chair of the committee respectively. Membership of the Planning Committee would not change under either option above, so it is recommended that the Council accept these nominations.

Recommendations

- It is proposed that the Council adopts the modified committee structure in option 2 and asks the members of each committee, where they have not already done so, to (i) nominate a Chair and Vice-Chair to be formally appointed at the next Council and; (ii) draft terms of reference to be discussed at the next full Council meeting; (iii) propose a schedule of meetings for 2023-24.
- It is proposed that Standing Orders be amended to specify a minimum membership for each standing committee of three members and a maximum of no more than five members. The quorum for a meeting of any committee will be at least three members.
- It is proposed that membership of the Planning, Environment and Open Spaces, and Highways & Road Safety Committees be as agreed in May 2023.
- It is proposed that the membership of the Allotments and Cemetery Committee be as agreed for the Allotments Committee in May 2023 with the addition of one member.
- It is proposed that the members of the Committee for Communication and Social Media appointed in May 2023 become members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, along with the Chair and Vice-Chair as *ex-officio* members of this committee.
- To appoint David Cunado and Philip James and Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee respectively.

Appendices – Membership of Standing Committees of the Parish Council May 2023

APPENDIX 1

Membership of Parish Council Standing Committees May 2023

THE ALLOTMENT COMMITTEE

Richard Williams, Jan Holmes and Felicity de Vries (Community Allotment).

THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Philip James, Jan Homes, David Cunado, Andy McPhee.

COMMITTEE OF ENVIRONMENT & OPEN SPACES

Philip James, David Cunado, Andy McPhee, Michael Kilpatrick,
Richard Williams.

COMMITTEE OF HIGHWAYS & ROAD SAFETY

Philip James, David Cunado, Andy McPhee, Michael Kilpatrick,
Richard Williams.

COMMITTEE OF SPEED MONITORS & DATA

Philip James, David Cunado, Andy McPhee, Michael Kilpatrick,
Richard Williams.

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL MEDIA

Felicity de Vries. Marc van Niekerk.

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