

## Full Council

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>Annual Town Meeting</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>14 January 2025</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Mandy Sturdy, Town Clerk</b> <b>Lizzie Fuller, Committee Services &amp; Processes Officer</b>

### Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide background for the discussion on the structure and content of the Annual Town Meeting on Wednesday 19 March 2025. There are Oxfordshire County Council elections on Thursday 1 May 2025. The 6-week pre-election period (previously known as purdah) is expected to begin on Thursday 20 March, after the Annual Town Meeting.

### Background

2. The meeting is a **meeting of the electorate, not the Town Council**, and at the meeting, the electorate are entitled to raise any question on any public matter, although normally only on topics relating to the parish.
3. Last year's Annual Town Meeting had the following agenda (items in italics are standard items):
  - *Welcome from the Mayor*
  - *Previous year's minutes*
  - *Town Mayor's report of previous year*
  - All About Thame Town Council
  - *Open Forum – Questions from Electors*

There was also an interactive element for residents to share ideas/thoughts to help contribute to the development of a strategy for Thame.

4. Last year was the first time that the meeting was held at Thame Barns Centre. Refreshments were provided. It is considered that the venue was much more accessible and overall worked better than the Town Hall, and has been booked (free use) for 2025.

### Proposal

5. The following options for 2025 have been suggested by officers and are for the council to consider however other suggestions from Members are welcome:
  - a) **10-year anniversary of Thame Good Neighbour Scheme** (launched in March 2015) and link to support networks for cost of living. The evening could be a celebration of the TGNS's achievements, as well as an opportunity to point residents to support networks available in Thame,

particularly in the cost-of-living crisis. The risk being that the start time of 7pm may be too late for some more vulnerable residents, however presentations could be recorded.

- b) **Thame Neighbourhood Plan 2 referendum outcome** – what next? The referendum outcome will be known, and the community will likely be interested to know what the result means.
  - c) **Strategy** – continued input from residents will support strategy development, including the results of various surveys including the budget survey and the results from last year’s meeting.
  - d) Presentation from an external organisation?
  - e) Activity related to ongoing council project?
6. It is suggested that the Open Forum element remain, with representatives from the three tiers of council (and possibly the MP, although security will need to be considered) present to answer questions (or make a commitment to take them away for further investigation and provide a later response). The format of the panel will be for the council to decide (i.e. who sits on it and whether the panel should sit at the front or be part of the audience).

### **Publicity**

- 7. Turnout has consistently been around 50 attendees in recent years.
- 8. The Communications & Events Officer has suggested ways to publicise the event in a way that may increase attendance, including avoiding terms like ‘Annual Town Meeting’ which give the impression the meeting is a council meeting.

### **Resource Appraisal**

- 9. The Town Council is sufficiently resourced to support the Annual Town Meeting requirements. Officer time will be needed to arrange a presentation(s) and facilitate the meeting and open forum.

### **Risk Assessment**

- 10. The meeting must be held in accordance with any national Health & Safety guidance and the Town Council’s Risk Assessments.
- 11. Review of emergency evacuation procedure in advance of meeting.
- 12. There may be limited attendance. Some towns see this as positive, as it suggests that things are generally progressing well, however if a focus is given for the meeting for residents to engage with, then a poor turnout should be avoided.
- 13. Expectations should be set out at an early stage, so residents are clear on what will / won’t be achieved at this meeting.

**Legal Powers**

- Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12 para 7 (1)
- Localism Act 2011 s1

**Recommendation:**

- i) **To agree the structure and content for the Annual Town Meeting 2025.**