

EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING

Town Clerk's report to Full Council 17th February 2021

Earley Town Council to call an Annual Town Electors' Meeting in 2021?

Background

The Annual Town Electors' Meeting (or Parish Meeting) is a meeting of the electors, *it is not a Town Council meeting*. There has been much discussion recently, amongst the parish and town council sector, about whether or not parish and town councils must call such a meeting in 2021 and, if they do so, how can such a meeting be held safely whilst complying with legislation, especially the requirement to allow attendance at such a meeting to every elector in the town.

Legislation requires a Parish Meeting to assemble between 1st March and 1st June (inclusive). A Parish Meeting is a thing, not an action. Every Parish has one (s9 LGA 1972), and it consists of all the electors in that parish (s13, LGA 1972). Therefore, 'holding a Parish Meeting' means facilitating the Parish Meeting in our area. No one is *required* to convene such a meeting, but the Chair of a parish council *may* convene it. Other who may convene the meeting include any two parish councillors or any six local government electors for the parish.

Considerations

The legislation enabling the holding of public meetings virtually initially did not cover Parish Meetings. This was amended to cover such meetings but the legislation falls away on 6th May 2021 – as it currently stands, from 7th May 2021 Town Council meetings (and Parish Meetings) will not be permitted to be held virtually. Although the government seems averse to extending the legislation, there is understandable pressure from town and parish council bodies for them to be permitted to meet virtually for some time to come.

Earley Town Council has previously agreed that the format of the Earley Annual Town Electors' Meeting would be revamped, providing more opportunity for involvement and representation by community groups and residents, as well as Town Council presentations. It had been suggested that the meeting be moved to Radstock Community Centre and consist of presentations and networking opportunities, possibly including a guest speaker.

Practicalities

As it currently stands, in order to hold an Annual Town Electors' Meeting virtually, it would have to be scheduled for between 1st March and 6th May 2021.

For a multitude of practical reasons, it would be extremely challenging for ETC to host a virtual meeting for all the electorate, presenters and guest speaker. It would be extremely unlikely that any such event would achieve the stated aim of providing more opportunity for involvement and representation.

As the law currently stands, an Annual Town Electors' Meeting held between 7th May and 1st June 2021 would have to be a physical meeting. It is highly likely that there would be a significant degree of reluctance amongst officers, councillors, community groups and residents to attend a large public meeting of this sort by this date.

Conclusion

- A recommendation that Earley Town Council declines to call an Annual Town Electors' Meeting in 2021.
- A recommendation that every effort is made to call an Annual Town Electors' Meeting in 2022, the format of which designed to encourage wider participation and representation from all sectors of the Earley community.
- A suggestion that, in the meantime, the Chair of Earley Town Council along with the Chairs of the standing committees, Amenities & Leisure, Planning and Policy & Resources, draft statements outlining the work and achievements of their respective committees over the past 12 months. These statements to be published on the Earley Town Council website.