

Subject: Timing and Format of the Annual Parish Meeting

1. Background

The Annual Parish Meeting (APM) is a meeting of the parish electorate rather than a meeting of the Parish Council. It provides residents with an opportunity to discuss matters affecting the parish, hear reports from local organisations, and raise issues of local interest.

Some parish councils hold the APM on the same evening as the Annual Council Meeting, while others hold it on a separate evening to allow greater focus on community engagement.

2. Holding the APM on the Same Evening as the Annual Council Meeting

Advantages

- More efficient use of councillors' time with only one meeting evening required.
- Reduced administrative effort and potential venue costs.
- Residents already attending the council meeting may remain for the APM.

Disadvantages

- The evening can become lengthy, which may discourage attendance.
- The APM can feel secondary to council business.
- Limited time for open discussion with residents.

3. Holding the APM on a Separate Evening

Advantages

- Greater focus on residents and community discussion.
- Flexibility to include presentations from local organisations or themed discussions.
- Opportunity to promote the meeting as a community event rather than a formal council meeting.

Disadvantages

- Requires an additional evening commitment for councillors and officers.
- Additional organisation and promotion may be required.
- There is a risk of low attendance if the meeting is not well promoted.

4. Approaches Used by Other Parish Councils to Increase Attendance

Many parish councils have increased engagement by adopting a more informal and community-focused approach to their APM. Examples include:

- **Inviting local groups** (e.g. sports clubs, youth organisations, or community groups) to give short updates on their activities.
- **Including a themed discussion** on a topic affecting the parish, such as local development, environmental issues, or community projects.
- **Providing a short report and question session** with district or county councillors.
- **Creating a more informal format**, allowing residents to ask questions or raise issues directly.
- **Offering light refreshments**, which encourages residents to stay and speak informally with councillors.

Experience elsewhere suggests that presenting the meeting as a community engagement event rather than a formal council meeting can improve attendance.

5. Recommendation

If councillors wish to encourage greater community participation, it is recommended that the Annual Parish Meeting is held on a separate evening to the Annual Council Meeting, but before Thursday 14 May, when the Annual Council Meeting is due to take place.

Holding the meeting on a separate evening would:

- provide more time for residents to raise issues and ask questions;
- allow for participation from local community organisations; and
- enable the meeting to be promoted as a community-focused event rather than part of a formal council meeting.

Careful promotion and the inclusion of local groups or speakers may help encourage stronger attendance and participation from residents.