

Further thoughts on running how council meetings can look

By Mel Usher

Last night was our council meeting. It got me thinking about the future of parish councils... again. Here are some thoughts based around the picture and last night's events.

Connection

You'll note, no formalities, wigs gowns etc. The room is laid out cafe style and all councillors except the mayor sit on self selected tables with members of the public, distinguishable only by an orange card for voting. There is no time limit on public involvement and they can join in discussions throughout the meeting. There were between 40 to 50 people there last night. We want people to come along although we are still struggling with live broadcasting which works sometimes but not others (like last night!). Generally we have stuff out in English, not local government speak, on social media the next day

Local issues

First up was a question from the public about the closing of the last local Sure Start Centre. There was a short discussion on the implications. No one "blamed" the County, they have had cuts of 40% to their budgets, but we want to get to a point where we know exactly what their intentions are. Perhaps the community and Town Council can take over the building? Its right that the Town Council should be a place to air this pressing and urgent concerns. Agreed to work with local county councillors on this.

Update 1

We had an update and video from a local charity chair about how they and others ran the firework display this year (attended by 6k people and raised £5k) . Interesting one this. Every year the town votes on events to be funded through "The People's Budget" over the next 12 months. Why? Because democracy shouldn't just be a vote every 4 years and the precept is not the council's money but the town's. The charities also managed to mobilise 100 volunteers and ran the whole event much better than us. A really important point here... we see our job is to make other organisations and individuals in town more successful, help them where possible and in this case fund the event/work/proposal etc. A good proportion of our budget is given to others with loose strings attached.

Update 2

Video again about an anti bullying rally held by 400 pupils from the 11 schools in town. Started by an 11 year old but organised and assisted by the Town Council. A moving event that exposed a growing problem and one that made the local TV news.

Report 1

Report to declare Climate Emergency and join the world wide Covenant of Mayors. Generally we are against empty gestures but we do have a carbon neutral plan already and this issue seems to be coming to the fore. We think part of our role is to influence thinking about the future and we have run a lot of popular talks, films , events on this matter. Currently there are no votes in this area but it

is important and as we are free of party ties we can afford to act as we wish. Good presentation....slides this time... and a quite high level discussion about how we can act locally. To achieve this the room broke into tables and had a 10 minute discussion and feedback which was fascinating. We have found if you treat people like adults they will act like adults. Agreed unanimously to resounding applause. Also filmed by a Danish TV company...don't ask!

Report 2

Take on more land, a 2 acre playing field from the district council at the request of local residents who want more decisions made locally and sensitively. And why not? Isn't that what we are all about...and if not why are we here?

Reports 4 and 5

Boring procedural updates

Report 6

A few years ago we bought a few acres on the edge of the town centre, attached to a wider derelict site. Ostensibly to continue to house a Skills and Learning centre but with an eye to the future. The decision is now coming to fruition with a 3 fold increase in price...and why shouldn't the town benefit from a little bit of public funded speculation?

Conclusion

Finished by 9-00 and in pub by 9-05.