

## INTRODUCTION

At a meeting of CGR affected Councils at Mountfield on Weds 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 the Bridport Town Clerk invited parishes to submit comments on how they believe the Ward structure should be arranged noting that it will be for the new Bridport Council to determine the future Governance of the Town Council from May 2024 and not the current Bridport Town Council (BTC).

A 20/10/2023 report [ENCL 3846](#) to the Town Council from its internal auditor stated, in regard to Council re-organisation: "The new legislative framework will enlarge the Town Council from 1 April 2024. The expanded Town Council will only legally operate after the elections in May 2024 have taken place." This document was noted and approved by the Bridport Town Council Finance & General Purposes Committee: [Minute 36](#) dated 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

## BACKGROUND EVIDENCE

In a [letter to Bridport News](#) dated Nov 2021 the leader of Bridport Town Council said: "The BTC proposal clearly states also that the new council would be 'warded' closely matching the existing parish councils' areas and that funded Ward Committees could have a budget to continue the local work referred to and that the inherited community infrastructure, knowledge and volunteering effort could easily be coordinated on a Ward basis as could local pages on the joint website".

In the [Sept 2022](#) version of The Bridge magazine The Town Council Leader wrote "As well as incorporating committees to retain local identities, BTC's submission set out plans to encourage the creation of local voluntary community groups to help protect the historic local village centres such as Bradpole, Bothenhampton, Walditch and West Bay."

In 2021 & 2022 Q & A documents, published on the Bridport Town Council website at the time, several "questions" were posed amongst which the following "answers" were given relating to the future governance structure:

### **Q. What is Bridport Town Council proposing?**

- **A.** Wards and council committees within the new council area based on local identity, with five wards representing Bradpole, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bridport Central, Bridport West & Allington, and West Bay;

### **Q. Will my local area lose out, with all of my Council Tax going into the town centre area?**

- **A.** No. The new council would have five local wards, each with separate committees with specific responsibility for protecting and improving their areas: Allington and West Bridport, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bradpole, Central Bridport, and West Bay. And don't forget, the councillors will be elected so will be directly accountable to you.

**Bradpole Parish Councillors support these proposals to ensure that each Ward Committee retains the identity of the community it represents and has sufficient powers to undertake its responsibilities in a meaningful way for the benefit of its residents.**

## GOVERNANCE

At an informal meeting in May 2023 representatives of Bradpole Parish Council offered to work with other Councils both to create Terms of Reference for each Ward Committee and to discuss future financial arrangements.

In line with para 166 of the [Guide To Community Governance Reviews](#) each of the five Wards forming the new Bridport Council should be seen in parity with no one Ward having a greater influence over any other to ensure democratic accountability. It was noted that whilst three of the proposed Wards had 5 Councillors Bothenhampton & Walditch had three and West Bay only two. BPC suggested that, for pragmatic governance purposes (meetings etc.), these two latter Wards should be combined whilst retaining their independent identities within the larger Council.

For the reasonable and transparent benefit of residents it was considered that Ward Committee meetings should take place within each Ward rather than, for some, the remote Mountfield. At the Nov. 2023 AGM of Bradpole Forster Village Hall it was minuted: **“It would not be feasible for people who live in Bradpole to go to Mountfield in the centre of Bridport to contact their councillors. The new Ward councillors may want to have a surgery at the hall as the Parish Council are doing now.”**

It was also suggested at the May 2023 meeting that Planning was very often a matter of local knowledge. The nature of planning applications normally seen in Bradpole are of a domestic nature but are nevertheless looked at carefully and responses are supported with planning policy evidence, simple stand alone “Object” or “Support” etc. comments being considered inappropriate.

This attention to detail is appreciated by local people as evidenced by this message from a resident as recently as Nov. 2023: **“I wonder whether this same local knowledge will be there when we become a ward of BTC?”**

The recently published [Community Governance Survey Results Summer 2023](#) demonstrates the importance of representing residents in the planning process placing it 2<sup>nd</sup> only to the management of Green spaces, Recreation Areas etc.

### **Consequently Bradpole Parish Council's proposition is;**

- That Ward Councillors should ensure the maintenance of Bridport Town Council services and community engagement in their areas of responsibility (e.g. Bradpole Ward) and have a funding budget to continue this work.
- That Ward-based Committee meetings are undertaken within each Ward (in the case of Bradpole at Bradpole Forster Village Hall), and clerked accordingly.  
In the interests of local continuity these meetings need to be scheduled for the early part of the incoming Council effective from May 2024.  
In addition a Parish Surgery could continue to operate at Bradpole Forster Village Hall.
- That Ward Councillors attend full Bridport Council meetings at Mountfield together with, where appointed, the various other Town Council Committee meetings held at Mountfield. *(or elsewhere as determined by those Committees / Full Council).*
- That Ward Committees receive delegated powers to submit statutory planning responses direct to Dorset Planners on Ward-based domestic and small business planning applications with larger and more significant applications *(to be defined)* being referred to the Town Council Planning Committee at which each Ward should be equally represented.

This proposal would ensure an effective and efficient service to residents providing opportunities to engage their local Ward Councillors directly in the process in the knowledge that those Councillors will understand planning issues in their areas of responsibility.

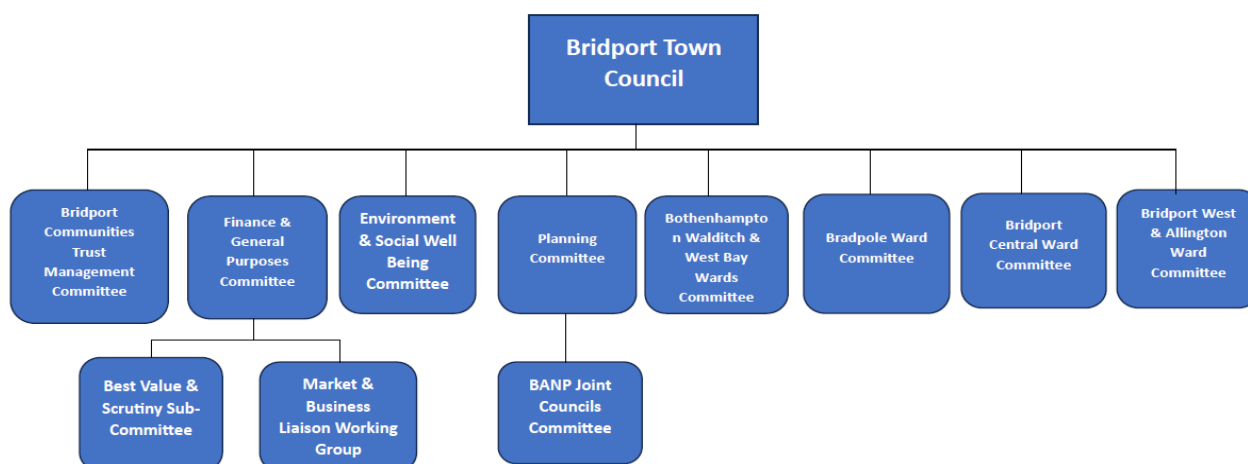
There is a limited time available for statutory consultees to respond to planning applications.

A direct Ward response to Planners would eliminate any time-consuming internal bureaucracy for the great majority of Ward-based applications.

Training in Planning matters will be required for Councillors of all Wards.

The Bradpole Parish Council proposal is reflected in this chart:

BRADPOLE PARISH COUNCIL PROPOSAL: – DRAFT COMMITTEE STRUCTURE for INCOMING COUNCIL MAY 2024



This draft structure has no constitutional standing but has been approved by Bradpole Parish Council

## CONCERNS

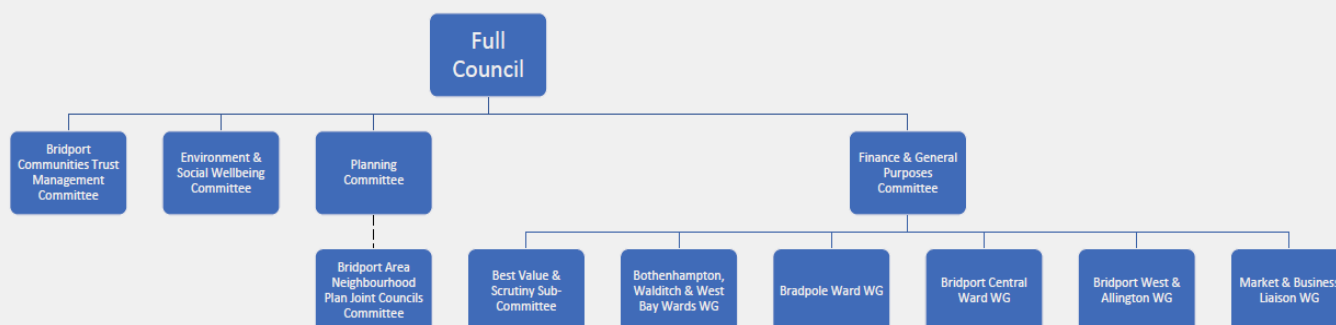
At a meeting of the various Councils dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 the agenda stated:

“Staffing structure will be in part dependent on the governance structure of the Council from next April. This will be discussed at the Town Council’s next F&GP Committee meeting on 13 November. Key decisions will be

- (i) ward-based groupings (committee/sub-committee/working group),
- (ii) whether some planning applications will be delegated to ward groupings, and
- (iii) any changes to the scheme of delegation.”

The following chart was presented implying that a working group arrangement for each Ward was the preferred option of the current Town Council, these have been subsequently described as “working assumptions”:

Bridport Town Council – Draft Committee Structure for 1 April 2024 (updated Nov 2023)



This draft structure has no constitutional standing and has not been approved by Bridport Town Council

As a Parish Councillor pointed out at the meeting there is a vast difference in powers between committees, sub-committees and working groups and that it was disappointing to see that the preference of the outgoing Town Councillors appeared to be that a low key “working group” model be followed for each Ward providing no powers to those Councillors elected by residents to represent the Wards.

A current Bridport Town [website page](#) states under Working Groups:

**“Where Working Groups are established, they are advisory bodies only with no delegated decision-making powers. All members are able to attend working group meetings.”**

This clearly shows that such an arrangement would not be in the spirit of what has been previously said nor, more importantly, would it be in the best interests of Ward residents.

It is acknowledged by Bradpole Parish Council that it will be for the newly elected Bridport Councillors, comprising of 20 elected Ward Councillors, to determine future governance arrangements and not the current Town Council.

It is therefore important that candidates for election fully understand the options available and the powers encompassed within those options.

## TERMS of REFERENCE

To affect these proposals it will be necessary to establish draft Terms of Reference for each Ward based Committee. (See Appendix 1 below)

Bridport Town Council’s current [2016 scheme of delegation](#) will need to be amended by the incoming Town Council to incorporate the new reality not least of all as the existing Scheme will be 8-years old by then.

It may be that the draft Ward Committee Terms of Reference may be incorporated within the revised Scheme in the form that presently exists for other Committees but this will be for the incoming Council to determine.

In the interests of continuity it would not be a major task to prepare a draft Scheme for the incoming Town Council to consider when it is legally able to operate from May 2024.

Consequently the accompanying Draft Ward Committee Terms of Reference should be considered as a guide to what could be in place from May 2024 and will require the addition of particular detail to be in accord with other Town Council policies.

Whilst this is a Bradpole Ward draft the bulk of the content should be appropriate for all Ward Committees subject to individual Ward detail.

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## **BRADPOLE WARD COUNCILLORS COMMITTEE (BWCC)**

### **DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**1. Name:** Bradpole Ward Councillors' Committee. (BWCC) *(or simply Bradpole Ward Committee)*

**2. Purpose:**

2.1 To be responsible for the deliverance of Bridport Council services within the Bradpole Ward area. *(to be determined by the incoming council)*

2.2 Committee decisions which seek to change these Terms of Reference will require the approval of the full Bridport Town Council (BTC).

**3. Membership:**

3.1 The Ward Committee shall comprise of the 5 elected members for Bradpole Ward.

3.2 The Ward Committee may:

a) Co-opt residents of the ward area on a non-voting basis.

b) Appoint community working parties, with appropriate terms of reference, to include Bradpole Ward electors / residents. Such working parties to report back to BWCC. *(Note: no decision-making powers)*

**4. Roles:** *(to be agreed by the incoming council but should include)*

4.1 Ward members to carry out delegated matters in their area of responsibility in accordance with the terms *(to be amended)* of the concurrent Standing Orders and Financial Regulations of BTC. *(and any scheme of delegation)*

4.2 PLANNING: BWCC shall respond to small/domestic/business planning applications within Bradpole Ward reporting corporate responses direct to Dorset Council Planners & to BTC Planning Committee.

Planning Applications determined as large and significant *(to be defined by the incoming council)* shall be referred to the full Planning Committee of BTC *(which itself should have equal representation from each Ward)*

4.3 To report back to the full Bridport Town Council on all matters

**5. Administration:**

5.1 BWCC shall act in accordance with the standing orders and financial regulations of BTC. *(to be reflected within the governance documents of BTC)*

5.2 The administration and clerking of meetings shall be overseen by BTC.

5.3 At the first meeting, and annually thereafter the BWCC will elect a Chair and, optionally, a Vice-Chair.

**6. Meetings:**

6.1 BWCC shall meet at least *quarterly* and the Chair, together with the Ward Clerk, or any two members of the BWCC, may call additional meetings as necessary.

6.2. Notice of meetings shall follow the requirements of town and parish councils, as prescribed by the Local Government Act 1972.

6.3 BWCC Meetings shall be held in public at Bradpole Forster Village Hall.

6.4 Meetings will be clerked in accordance with BTC arrangements and the minutes of meetings shall be recorded, circulated to members, and published by BTC in a timely manner. *(draft minutes normally within 4 weeks of any meeting)*

6.5 The quorum for any meeting of the BWCC shall be 3.

6.6. A simple majority of BWCC members is required for recommendations or resolutions to be valid. In the case of an equality of votes, the Chair may at her/his discretion exercise a casting vote.

## 7. Finance:

7.1.All funding shall be held by BTC, who shall be the accountable body.

7.2 .Insurance cover will be provided by BTC

7.3 BWCC to prepare an annual Ward budget and receive a funding “pot” to enable its responsibilities *(to be defined)* to be carried out within the Ward.

7.4 Financial information *(budgets/expenditure etc.)* to be provided at each Ward Committee meeting.

APPROVED BY BRADPOLE PARISH COUNCIL  
7<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2023

### Notes:

*This document is for guidance purposes with certain criteria yet to be considered largely by the incoming council.*

*Whilst the above relates to Bradpole Ward the basic terms of reference should apply to all Ward Committees on an equal basis amended to suit local circumstances.*

*In the case of Bothenhampton & Walditch Ward and West Bay Ward it may be more pragmatic to combine both into a BW&WB Ward Committee for the purpose of meetings providing 5 Councillors enabling a sustainable quorum to be established.*

*Any disagreements between Ward Committees should be resolved in accord with BTC Standing Orders.*

According to the [Good Councillors Guide 2018](#):

- **Committee meetings** bring together a smaller number of councillors to concentrate on a specific function of the council and share the workload.
- **Sub-committees** are appointed by a committee to focus discussion on a specific topic among an even smaller group of councillors. Otherwise, they operate like committees. There are rules about who is permitted to join a committee or sub-committee. Sometimes non-councillors can be included (although with a few exceptions, they cannot vote). This is an excellent means of involving others, particularly young people, in council work.
- **Working parties** or ‘task-and-finish’ groups are occasionally set up for a short-term purpose. They are not subject to the strict rules that apply to formal council meetings and do not need to be held in public.

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