

Report To: Democratic Services Committee

Date of Meeting: 28 November 2014

Lead Officers: Democratic Services Manager
& Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Title: Committee Timetable for 2015 / 2016

1. What is the report about?

This report contains information and seeks views on timetabling and committee-related issues.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

Early in 2015 Council will need to approve a timetable of the principal committee meetings for 2015 / 16. When Council approved its timetable for the current municipal year members requested that the 12 month timetable be extended to an 18 month timetable.

The Council's *Freedoms and Flexibilities* process has recently proposed that the committee timetable be reduced by 1 meeting per committee next municipal year, in order to reduce expenditure.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Democratic Services Committee considers:

- (i) issues relating to extending the annual committee timetable to cover an 18 month period; and
- (ii) its views in respect of the mechanism to be used to reduce by 1 meeting per year the number of meetings held by each committee.

4. Report details.

The new municipal year begins with the Annual Meeting of Council in May, when the current timetable of committee meetings ends.

An 18 Month Schedule

- 4.1 A longer schedule was advocated by some members on the grounds that it would allow members to better plan their activities and manage their diary commitments. It is therefore intended that the draft timetable for 2015 / 16 will run from May 2015 to December 2016 (instead of from May 2015 to May 2016).

- 4.2 A new timetable would be submitted for Council approval during the early part of 2016 which would then roll forward the period already approved (May 2016 to December 2016) and extend it until December 2017.
- 4.3 In April 2013 Council considered the results of a survey of all members of their preferences in respect of the timing (daytime or evening meetings, etc) and location of Council and committee meetings. Based on the views of members at that time it is proposed to retain the current mix of mostly morning meetings but with some committees or panels meeting in the afternoon. The Council does arrange a small number of evening meetings (for some of the Member Area Groups, for example). Most meetings would be held County Hall but some meetings could be arranged for other venues in the county.

Reducing the Number of Meetings: Freedoms & Flexibilities

- 4.4 In October 2014, a Members' Budget Workshop considered new proposals to save money under the *Freedoms and Flexibilities* process. The Workshop considered how having fewer committee meetings would reduce the cost of travel payments and that the amount saved would depend on which committees were reduced, and the membership of those committees (i.e. whether the members involved claimed expenses, and how long their journeys were).
- 4.5 It was estimated that each full Council meeting costs approximately £200 in travel expenses, a Planning Committee meeting £137, a Cabinet meeting £95, a Scrutiny Committee meeting £50 and a Corporate Governance Committee meeting £52.
- 4.6 Reducing 1 meeting per year of the above-mentioned committees would be likely to reduce expenditure on travel by an estimated £600. Additional savings would be made by including other committees (Council Briefings and Cabinet Briefings, Licensing Committee, LJCC etc). It should be noted that the largest part of members' travel expenses are not created by these principal committee meetings; rather they are in connection with the many other meetings, briefings, training sessions and work with external organisations that members routinely undertake as part of their duties as councillors.
- 4.7 In addition to reducing meetings, savings could be made from holding two meetings on the same day i.e. one in the morning and one in the afternoon. It should be noted however that savings would only be achieved if the members involved in those two meetings had intended to be present at both meetings and claim travel expenses. Because of this linking a meeting of, for example, the Standards Committee with a meeting of the Licensing Committee would probably not have any effect on expenditure.
- 4.8 A reduction of 1 meeting per committee as required under *Freedoms and Flexibilities* could involve lengthening the cycle of each committee's meeting timetable. Cabinet, for example, usually meets once every calendar month (ideally towards the end of the month to enable prompt reporting of financial information). A lengthened cycle could have a gap of 5 or more weeks

between meetings. The Planning Committee also meets once per calendar month, whilst the Scrutiny and Corporate Governance Committees generally work on a 6 weekly-cycle; lengthening the time between these committees' meetings would reduce the number of meetings.

- 4.9 Alternatively, a single meeting of a committee could be simply removed without changing the overall cycle for the committee concerned. The Democratic Services Committee's views on how the reduction in committee meetings should be achieved are sought.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The decisions and information arising from this report are central to the functioning of the democratic and committee systems which are essential elements of the Council's governance arrangements and contribute to the Council's corporate priorities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The costs of maintaining a committee system are covered within existing budgets. Services throughout the Council may contribute to the meetings included in the timetable, usually by contributing information, reports and officer time.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?

The annual timetable of meetings is an established process and meets the aims of the Equality Act. The principal 'service users' are the members of the committees and supporting officers although the press and public are also able to attend most meetings the interest of individuals or groups is likely to depend on the topic under consideration.

A survey of councillors was conducted in 2012 on the timing and location of meetings and the results have been taken into consideration. The Council uses the most suitable meeting rooms whenever possible (in terms of access, parking, toilet facilities, public transport).

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

Full Council has been consulted and given guidance on the timing and length of the Committee timetable. Members have also considered how a reduction in the number of meetings can be used to achieve savings through their budget workshops.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Not obtained for this report.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

Failure to confirm a new meeting schedule and other committee-related issues in this report would be detrimental to the Council's governance arrangements.

11. Power to make the Decision

Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972