

## ANNUAL COUNCIL

29<sup>th</sup> June 2020

### PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2020/21

#### Report of the Strategic Director for Resources

Strategic Aim:	All	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	N/A	
Contact Officer(s):	Phil Horsfield, Deputy Director Corporate Governance	01572 758154 phorsfield@rutland.gov.uk
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

1. Approves the programme of meetings for 2020/21 attached as Appendix A.
2. Approves the review of the meeting programme on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020
3. Notes the provisional timetable for returning to a full programme of meetings

#### 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Council at its Annual Council Meeting agrees the date and time of ordinary meetings of Council (and its Committees) for the coming Municipal Year. This report presents the programme of meetings and the principles that have been applied in compiling it and suggests criteria for assessing when the full programme should be reinstated.

#### 2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 The Schedule of meeting dates is underpinned by a series of principles which are applied to ensure adherence to the Constitution and other Financial and Legislative requirements as well as affording some consistency from year to year.
- 2.2 Due to the Covid19 pandemic, in April 2020 Local Authorities in England were handed new powers to hold public meetings virtually; this together with the

resources demands of responding to the pandemic has resulted in deviations to the usual cycle of meetings that have been scheduled for the next few months. The Council is still operating in the midst of a crisis whilst taking tentative steps towards re-boot and recovery. Significant Council resource is still being targeted at the crisis situation and equally at re-booting services. Uncertainty remains in relation to an end point in relation to the crisis. For example, the Council continues to provide significant support under the Governments Shield programme and is one of 11 national pilots for test, trace and track.

Thus a return to a full meeting programme is not possible at this time and this report reflects that position. The appended programme of meetings therefore includes the continuation of the virtual meetings which are currently taking place i.e. Council and Cabinet. It also includes an increase in the scope of virtual meetings which can take place

The meeting programme as proposed makes an assumption is that a full programme of meetings will be resumed from January 2021. However, the annual programme of meetings will be kept under review (next review due by 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020) and at the right time for the organisation (on the basis of available resources) there will be move towards a full programme of meetings. The current regulations allowing Councils to hold virtual meetings is effective until May 2021 and the issue of making permanent provision for virtual meetings has been discussed in the House of Lords where it met with approval from the relevant Minister.

The timetable proposed takes into account the feedback from Councillors through the briefing calls and at other meetings and a number of other factors. These are:

- 2.2.1 Maintaining democratic accountability;
  - 2.2.2 Meeting statutory timescales (eg in relation to the budget)
  - 2.2.3 Good governance practice (maintaining a balance between executive decision making and scrutiny of those decisions)
  - 2.2.4 Enabling essential decision making to continue;
  - 2.2.5 The continuation of the Council's emergency response
  - 2.2.6 Resources required for recovery work;
  - 2.2.7 Resources to enable the meetings (these depend on the redeployment of staff to meet needs associated with the pandemic in support teams such as Governance and IT); and
  - 2.2.8 Resources to provide material for meetings (these depend on the redeployment of staff to meet needs associated with the pandemic in roles that would usually provide reports and develop policies etc. that would form the material to be put before Cabinet, Council or a Committee).
- 2.3 While there remains significant uncertainty it would appear that as a minimum the Council will remain in a position where it is responding to significant demands for the remainder of the year despite the Governments furlough scheme anticipated to end in October 2020. This does not factor in resources required for any recovery

activity in the new year.

#### 2.4 The interim position:

- 2.4.1 Cabinet will continue monthly (virtually)
- 2.4.2 Council meetings will take place monthly if there is business requiring a meeting but no less than every 8 weeks (virtually)
- 2.4.3 Planning Committee will take place every 4 weeks or as required (virtually)
- 2.4.4 Audit and Risk meetings to meet the requirements for the submission of budgetary information and financial planning.
- 2.5 The Scrutiny Commission will, within 2 weeks of the date of this Council meeting, meet with the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer to establish a way forwards for each Scrutiny Committee to ensure that there is an effective continuation of work carried out.
- 2.6 The timetable provides for a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee each month together with an additional meeting to address the budget. Which Committee will be meeting has not being included in the timetable as it is anticipated that this will be agreed with Scrutiny Commission in the meeting described in 2.5 above.
- 2.7 Additional meetings will be considered by the Scrutiny Commission where resources allow enable meeting on specific topics arising from the Policy Framework or requested by that Committee. It is hoped that this will balance a proactive approach to the Overview function with the resources available during the emergency the recovery.
- 2.8 In addition to the above the virtual briefings for all Councillors will continue but move from weekly to monthly (except where there is no Council meeting in a particular month – then the Formal Council meeting will be replaced by a Briefing) and Councillors will continue to receive a weekly email updating them on key issues. This provides for more meetings of all Councillors that would be the case prior to the emergency, ensures that Members continue to have an opportunity for a face to face briefing, the opportunity to ask questions and can continue the vital role that they have played in linking to our communities.
- 2.9 The Single Point of Contact for Members queries will remain in place.
- 2.10 Senior Management Team have been consulted to ensure that Committee meetings will be lawful and enough resources in place to support the proposed meetings.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 It is a legislative requirement to publish a notice of ordinary meetings of the Council and its Committees.
- 3.2 Reinstate the full programme of meetings immediately – this option has been dismissed as significant additional senior resources and staff resource would be required that would have a substantial cost.

- 3.3 Operate using only delegated powers in light of the pandemic. This would not meet the requirement of providing for democratic involvement in decision making.

#### **4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Should Council wish to reinstate all meetings additional costs may be incurred due to the need to recruit additional staff to help with the recovery and re-boot. In addition, further support may be needed to assist the Governance Team and IT Team in order to successfully administer and facilitate the statutory meetings.
- 4.2 In addition to administrative resource the Council would need to be at a senior level in order to enable input in to the Policy development role that would be required for interaction with Councillors. Such recruitment would inevitably draw on existing senior resource and would involve the re-prioritisation of some existing work in the short term.

#### **5 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 5.1 As required by Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, a notice is published on the notice board at the Council Offices informing the public of the meetings of the Council and its Committees.
- 5.2 However, amendments included in The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, Part 3 para, 15 (c & d) states that:

*c) a document being “open to inspection” includes being published on the website of the council;*

*(d) the publication, posting or making available of a document at offices of the council include publication on the website of the council.”*

- 5.3 As soon as reasonable practicable, a notice will also be published on the notice board at the Council Offices.
- 5.4 If changes are made to the public notice by the Proper Officer, the notice will be updated and information fully publicised on the Council’s website.

#### **6 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no data protection implications.

#### **7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed because there are no service, policy or organisational changes being proposed.

#### **8 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no community safety implications.

#### **9 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications.

## **10 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 To ensure that a schedule of the ordinary meetings of the Council and its Committees can be published in line with legislative requirements.

## **11 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 There are no additional background papers to the report.

## **12 APPENDICES**

12.1 Appendix A – Programme of Meetings 2020/21

**A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.**