

## ANNUAL COUNCIL

10<sup>th</sup> May 2021

### PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2021/22

#### Report of the Monitoring Officer

Strategic Aim:	All	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Leader and Portfolio Holder for Rutland One Public Estate & Growth, Tourism & Economic Development, Communications, and Resources (other than Finance)	
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

1. Approves the programme of meetings for 2021/22 attached as Appendix A.

## 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.

## 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, where possible, 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. Adapting to this new way of working, together with the resource demands of responding to the pandemic

resulted in initial delays and deviations to the usual cycle of meetings that were scheduled, however by the end of the municipal year 2020/21 virtual meetings were operating well, public attendance had increased and Members, in general, expressed a preference for continuing with virtual meetings.

- 2.3 In March of this year, Luke Hall MP, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government, announced that the powers to hold public meetings virtually would be revoked on May 7. As such we are introducing an interim hybrid model in order to make meetings as safe as possible for all those attending in person. Social distancing measures will be in place and attendees will be required to take a Covid test within 24 hours of the meeting.
- 2.4 The Government's phased reduction of lockdown measures, with an expected end to the restrictions on the number of people allowed to gather indoors by June 21<sup>st</sup> but a possible continuation of social distancing measures, has resulted in some uncertainty as to the set-up of meetings going forward. This has been compounded for RCC as the Council chamber is currently being used as a vaccination centre and therefore alternative venues, that are large enough to accommodate social distanced attendees, need to be sought.
- 2.5 Taking into account the Covid restrictions, the meeting programme as attached proposes the following:
- Until June 21<sup>st</sup> the only physical meetings held in public will be Council and Planning and Licensing
  - Cabinet meetings will operate virtually with the Leader delegating the ability to make decisions to the Portfolio Holder in consultation with Cabinet. This consultation with Cabinet would be in the form of the usual Cabinet meeting. The Leader of the Council may vary the executive arrangements at any time and is not required to do so only at council meetings.
  - Admittance to the meetings by members of the Public will be limited although meetings will be live streamed so that members of the Public will still be able to observe proceedings.
  - Non-decision making committees will continue to be held virtually, using the Zoom platform.
- 2.6 Despite the adjustments made the timetable proposed does take into account the following
- Maintaining democratic accountability;
  - Meeting statutory timescales (eg in relation to the budget)
  - Good governance practice (maintaining a balance between executive decision making and scrutiny of those decisions)
  - Enabling essential decision making to continue;
  - Resources, both in terms of staff and the equipment required to carry out hybrid meetings.
- 2.7 The position in regard to virtual meetings will be closely monitored.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1 It is a legislative requirement to publish a notice of ordinary meetings of the Council and its Committees and therefore there is no alternative option.

3.2 Options for the delivery of the meetings have been considered and the alternative options outlined below have been discounted.

- Reinststate a full programme of virtual meetings – this option has been discounted at present as given the current situation any decisions made would be invalid and liable to legal challenge.
- Operate using solely delegated powers. This would not meet the requirement of providing for democratic involvement in decision making.

### **4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Hosting hybrid meetings will incur costs; these include possible venue hire (while the Council chamber is being used as a vaccination centre), additional meeting and IT equipment, extra staffing costs and the costs associated with making the venue Covid secure.

### **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. The Council also publishes notices on the Council's website.

5.2 As soon as reasonable practicable, a notice will also be published on the notice board at the Council Offices.

5.3 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 The re-introduction of physical meetings has some community safety implications but these are mitigated by adherence to Government guidelines on meeting in public and the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions as the number of people vaccinated against Covid-19 increases. Levels of Covid19 in Rutland continue to fall.

## **9 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The measures being taken for a safe return to meetings held in public include social distancing, well ventilated rooms, the use of lateral flow testing and the requirement to wear masks. This is in line with Government guidance to limit any implications for health and wellbeing.

## **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 2021/22

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