

CONSTITUTION AND ETHICS COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
8 JULY 2019	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Fiona McMillan, Director of Law and Governance	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Farooq, Cabinet Member for Digital Services and Transformation	
Contact Officer(s):	Pippa Turvey, Democratic and Constitutional Services Manager	Tel. 452460

COUNCIL MEETING FREQUENCY AND COMMITTEE START TIMES

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM: <i>Director of Law and Governance</i>	Deadline date: <i>N/A</i>
<p>It is recommended that the Constitution and Ethics Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Endorse the continuation of six meetings of Full Council per annum, including the Annual Council meeting; and 2. Recommend to Council that the Standing Orders and Member Officer Protocol be amended as set out in paragraphs 4.2.8 and 4.2.9 of the report, to allow committees of Council to determine their own starting times. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to the Constitution and Ethics Committee following discussion at a meeting of Group Leaders in relation to the frequency of Full Council meetings and the start time of Committee meetings.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with sufficient information for it to make a determination on whether it wants to recommend an amendment the frequency of Full Council meetings and whether it wants to recommend that the starting times of committee meetings should be determined by the committees themselves.

2.2 This report is for the Constitution and Ethics to consider under its Terms of Reference No 2.7.2.1, 'Authority to oversee the operation of the Council's Constitution and authority to make recommendations to Full Council as to amendments and improvements to the Council's Constitution (including the codes and protocols) subject to the receipt and consideration of a report prepared by the Monitoring Officer, with the exception of those matters under the remit of the Executive.'

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 Council Meeting Frequency

4.1.1 The Full Council as a meeting currently meets approximately seven times a year, including the Mayor Making meeting and the Annual Council meeting. These meetings are typically spread across the municipal year between May and March.

4.2.1 There is no legal requirement for local authorities to hold a certain number of Full Council meetings each year. For comparison, the number of Council meetings held by a (randomly selected) range of other authorities is detailed below.

Authority	Number of Meetings in 2018/19
Medway	6
Derby	7
Nottingham	6
Rutland	9
Central Bedfordshire	7
Bedford Borough	8
North Lincolnshire	4
Milton Keynes	8
Leicester City	8
Slough	9
Luton	10
Portsmouth	8
Southampton	6
North Lincolnshire	4
Redcar and Cleveland	7
Southend on Sea	7
Swindon Borough	7
Thurrock	9
Cambridgeshire County	6
Average	7

4.1.3 The number of meetings per year range from four to 10. The average number of meetings held per year is seven, which is in line with the number currently held by Peterborough City Council.

4.1.4 In terms of the amount of business discussed at each meeting, the average number of agenda items (excluding 'standing items') for Peterborough City Council meetings in 2018/19 was six, with a range from three to nine. The average number of motions submitted per meeting was six, with a range from five to seven. The average number of questions submitted per meeting was 21, with a range from nine to 27.

4.1.5 The rationale behind increasing the number of Council meetings per year would be to provide further opportunities for Members to submit motions for debate and to ask questions to the executive.

- 4.1.6 In terms of resources, each Full Council meeting requires a significant amount of preparation. This includes over 50 hours of officer time (in Democratic Services only) to undertake over 80 separate tasks. In addition to this, Corporate Management Team time is required in preparation and attendance at the meeting, and numerous support staff are required to attend each meeting. To increase the number of Council meetings per year by any significant amount would place a strain on the current officer resource.
- 4.1.7 Furthermore, each meeting of Full Council costs approximately £3,500. This should be taken into account in light of the increasing budget pressures facing the Council.

4.2 Committee Start Times

- 4.2.1 In terms of current practice, Full Council in January or March agrees the draft meeting schedule, this is then agreed in its final form at Annual Council. This includes the meeting start times. These are typically 7pm for committee meetings and 6pm for Council meetings.
- 4.2.2 Historically, meetings have been included in the meeting schedule at 7pm in order to allow Members and the public, who work during the daytime, sufficient time to attend meetings at the Town Hall.
- 4.2.3 A small number of committee meetings are held at other times, including Planning and Environmental Protection Committee, Health and Wellbeing Board, Scrutiny of the Budget, Cabinet, and informal Corporate Parenting. This is due to practical reasons, such as those attending or the potential length of the meeting.
- 4.2.4 Comment has been made to officers by Members as to whether allowing committees to determine their own start times would ensure a higher attendance at meetings and would mean that Members and officer time is used more efficiently.
- 4.2.5 In order for officers to properly draft an effective Annual Calendar of Meetings, the start time of meetings needs to be agreed prior to the Calendar being finalised (in order to ensure no meetings overlap on one day). Therefore, should Members wish for Committee's to determine their own start time, the start time for the meeting would need to be agreed by the committee ahead of the start of the municipal year, i.e. in January or February.
- 4.2.6 This would allow for the draft Annual Calendar of Meetings to be submitted to Council in March, and the final Calendar to the Annual Council meeting.
- 4.2.7 To give effect to such a change, the constitution would need to be amended in two sections, as proposed below.
- 4.2.8 Standing Orders:

"4.4 Timings of meetings

4.4.1 The timings of normal committee meetings will be agreed by the committee for the next municipal year in January of the preceding municipal year (or as near to this time as possible).

4.45 Variation to the meeting schedule, timings and cancellation of meetings

4.45.2 If there is disagreement about the timing of an additional meeting between the Chairman and Group representatives, the meeting will start at the normal time for meetings of that Committee as identified previously by the committee and included within the Annual Calendar of meetings approved by Council."

- 4.2.9 The Member / Officer Protocol:

"12.3 Timing The timing of normal committee meetings will be agreed by the committee for the next municipal year in January of the preceding municipal year (or as near to this time as

possible). For an additional or extraordinary committee meeting, if there is disagreement about timing between the chairman and group representatives, the meeting will start at the normal time for meetings of that committee as identified previously by the committee and included in the Annual Calendar of Meetings approved by Council. If there is an unresolved dispute for a working group this will be determined by the parent body.”

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation has been undertaken with officers within Constitutional Services who support the Full Council and committee meetings.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 It is anticipated that the Committee will determine the best direction for the future of Full Council meetings and committees of Council. This will ensure that the meetings are open and transparent and allow for the Council’s decision making process to be followed in an effective and efficient manner.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 To ensure that the Council’s resources are used in an effective and efficient manner while maintaining an open and transparent decision making process.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 To increase the number of Full Council meetings per year - This option has not been recommended by officers as this would result in a significant increase in the resource demand and it is considered that the number of Council meetings currently held by the Council is largely reflective of other local authorities and sufficient for the business of the Council.

For Full Council to retain responsibility for determining committee start times - This option has not been recommended by officers as there is no evidential benefit that would be missed Full Council retaining this power.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 9.1 There may be finance and officer resource implications arising should a significant number of Full Council meetings be added into the meetings schedule.

Legal Implications

- 9.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

- 9.3 There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Children in Care and Care Leavers Implications

- 9.4 In relation to meetings that Children in Care and Care Leavers may attend (i.e. informal Corporate Parenting meetings), the potential for committees to set their own start times may impact on the ability for such individuals to attend.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 10.1 Peterborough City Council Constitution

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None.

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