

Report to the Council

Subject: Calendar of Meetings 2023/24 and Scrutiny Committee Restructure

Date: 4 April 2023.

Portfolio Holder: Internal Resources

Recommending:

- 1. That the following proposed changes from the Constitution Working Group to the Council's Scrutiny Committee structure be recommended to the Council for approval:**
 - (a) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be retained on the Council's Committee list;**
 - (b) That the Stronger Council Select Committee be removed from the Council's committee list and its work programme be absorbed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;**
 - (c) That the Stronger Communities and Stronger Place Select Committees be retained on the Council's committee list and their work programmes continue to be aligned with the corresponding key themes within the Council's Corporate Plan;**
 - (d) That the two select committees be renamed as the Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Place Scrutiny Committee;**
 - (e) That nominations for all three Scrutiny committees be undertaken by the Appointments Panel and recommended to the Annual Council meeting for approval each year – therefore, the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June would not be required;**
 - (f) That the position of Chairmen for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be filled by a member outside of the majority group but experienced in scrutiny matters;**
 - (g) That the position of Vice-Chairmen for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees need not all be filled outside of the majority group; and**
 - (h) That the Monitoring Officer be delegated authority to make the necessary revisions within the Constitution to implement the changes above;**
- 2. That only the Chairman of Committees receive paper copies of agenda for their meetings from 2023/24; and**
- 3. That, as attached at Appendix 1, the draft Calendar of Council Meetings for 2023/24 be recommended to the Council for adoption.**

1. Democratic Services submit a draft Calendar of Council meetings each year to the Council for approval. Significant changes are proposed due to current inconsistencies and overlap in responsibilities creating confusion in reporting lines. As the Council is also facing the biggest financial challenge in years the changes proposed will also assist in reducing the cost of supporting meetings.

2. This year, the focus has been to ensure that the correct report lines are created to allow the relevant committees to be informed, to scrutinise and to make valuable contributions to the decisions of the Council. Emphasis on the financial framework and the scrutiny of the Medium-Term Financial Plan which includes the Budget Strategy and Capital Programmes have been used to develop the cycle of meetings as well as Performance Indicators. Various officers and departments have been consulted to ensure that their requirements for reporting have been considered.

3. In line with the strategic direction of the Cabinet, senior officers prepared 2023/24 saving proposals which included strengthening and streamlining the Council Governance arrangements. This included bringing forward proposals for consolidating and removing some meetings. Whilst a reduction in the size of the Democratic Services Team was included within the approved budget, a decision on altering current scrutiny arrangements rests with the Council. A decision to adopt the recommendations of the Constitution Working Group, in addition to strengthening governance arrangements, would also assist in delivering the approved budget.

4. Furthermore, to assist with the saving proposals and in promoting the objectives of the Climate Change Action Plan, it is recommended that only the Chairman of the relevant Committees receive a paper copy of the agenda and all other members of the Committee access the documents electronically. The Mod.gov app and Members Portal provide access to the documents and officers from Democratic Services, Member Services and ICT will and have been assisting Members with their own and Council supplied devices.

The Executive

5. The Cabinet is scheduled to meet 7 times throughout 2023/24 and the Cabinet Sub-Committees have been consolidated into the Cabinet. The first meeting of Cabinet has been scheduled for late May to ensure that the Cabinet approves the reserves by the required deadline. This will also be an annual requirement going forward.

6. The Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee and Local Plan Cabinet Committee are to be decommissioned, and all business to be considered through Cabinet. It is worth noting that Local Plan Cabinet Committee last met on the 17 October 2019 and must refer all recommendations to Cabinet and the last two Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee have been cancelled. If required, the Cabinet Housebuilding Cabinet Committee could be retained, and could meet as and when required.

Overview & Scrutiny

7. At a special meeting held on 16 March 2023, the Constitution Working Group considered options for the restructure of the Council's Scrutiny Committees for the 2023/24 municipal year. The drivers for this were the observable overlap between the work programmes of the Stronger Council Select Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the reduced capacity of the Democratic Services Team in 2023/24. In discussions between Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Internal Resources, two options emerged:

(i) Retention of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, plus the Stronger Communities and Stronger Place Select Committees, with the Stronger Council Select Committee being abolished; or

(ii) Retention of the three Select Committees – Stronger Council, Stronger Communities and Stronger Place – and the abolition of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8. After a full debate, the Constitution Working Group resolved to recommend option (i) above to the Council for approval. The Working Group also considered a number of other matters in connection with the Council's Scrutiny function and have made a number of further recommendations for the Council to consider and agree.

9. The Working Group felt that the two remaining committees should not retain the 'Select Committee' name as they worked very differently to the Select Committees in the Houses of Parliament. It was felt that they should be renamed the Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Place Scrutiny Committee respectively.

10. In addition, the Group favoured the proposal under option (ii) for all of the Scrutiny Committees to be appointed at the Annual Council meeting in May. This would enable the first Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in early June to be removed from the calendar, as the main business of this meeting is to appoint members to the Scrutiny Committees.

11. The proposal for the Chairman of the three proposed Scrutiny Committees to be members of the non-majority political group was also agreed, but that the Chairman should be experienced in Scrutiny matters. In respect of the Vice-Chairman positions, the Group was more relaxed about whether they could be filled by a member of the majority political group.

12. The Constitution Working Group also noted that it was intended to hold quarterly meetings between the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Scrutiny Committees to manage the work programmes of all three committees. In addition, there will be regular joint meetings between the Executive and Scrutiny Chairmen to manage the business passing between the two functions of the Council.

13. At the request of a member in attendance, the Constitution Working Group agreed that the proposals should go before one of the current Scrutiny Committees for their views. The report and the recommendations of the Constitution Working Group were considered by the Stronger Communities Select Committee at its meeting on 21 March 2023.

14. The Select Committee felt that the quality of Scrutiny was more important than the number of Scrutiny Committees, and they supported the recommendations of the Constitution Working Group.

Planning

15. It is proposed that the District Development Management Committee and the planning sub-committee meetings will revert to meeting every six weeks as agreed with the Planning Development Team Manager. The week of the Annual Council meeting has again been kept free of Planning meetings.

Licensing

16. Following consultation with Licensing Officers, the two scheduled meetings per month will continue, as not all items fall in line with the scheduled meeting at the start of each month. Predominantly the additional meeting is cancelled but it is felt that for both members of the committee and officers this date is scheduled to assist with availability. The extra dates also assist with urgent business that occurs as well.

17. There have been no evening meetings for Licensing in 2022/23 and this will continue. Although a Premises Review could be held in the evening, if the Chairman of the Licensing Committee felt that it would be in the public interest to do so.

18. All members of the Licensing Committee continue to meet twice a year to consider policy and procedural matters.

Miscellaneous Committees

19. Both the Youth Council and the Local Highways Panel have not been included in this schedule as it is felt that they are meetings which sit outside the Council Calendar. The Youth Council have their own programme, and although the Local Highways Panel involves both the County and District Councillors, they are not organised by the District Council.

20. The Appointments Panel has been scheduled for 11 May and 18 May, on the Thursdays during the weeks before the Annual Council and following the Local Elections on 4 May 2023.

21. The Local Councils Liaison Committee will again meet twice during the year.

Conclusion

22. The Council is requested to consider the draft Calendar of Council meetings for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix 1, and advise whether any further changes are required. However, it should be noted that with the reduction in the Governance team, any additional meetings should be given very careful consideration.

23. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.

Resource Implications:

Any substantial increase in the number of Member meetings could not be supported by the new structure within Democratic Services.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None foreseen, as the proposed Calendar allows the Council to fulfil its obligations under the various Local Government Acts.

Safer, Greener and Cleaner Implications:

A reduction in the number of paper copies of agenda produced for each meeting will assist the Council in meeting its commitments under the Climate Change Action Plan.

Consultation Undertaken:

Officers, Senior Leadership Team, Senior members of Cabinet, the Constitution Working Group, Stronger Communities Select Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Internal Resources as part of the budget setting process.

Background Papers:

None.

Risk Management:

That sufficient meetings would be scheduled for a committee to complete its business for the year; however, if it became apparent that this was not the case then additional meetings could be arranged as necessary. Similarly, meetings can be cancelled if there is a lack of business.