



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL - 22 JANUARY 2020
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM (10)
Subject	SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2020/21 AND MEETING ARRANGEMENTS
Wards affected	Not applicable
Accountable member	Cllr. Joe Harris – Leader of the Council and Chair of the Constitution Working Group Email: joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Nigel Adams - Head of Paid Service Tel: 01285 623202 Email: nigel.adams@cotswold.gov.uk Bhavna Patel - Group Manager Legal Services and Monitoring Officer Tel: 01285 623219 Email: bhavna.patel@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the draft Schedule of Meetings for 2020/21; and suggestions arising out of the deliberations of the Constitution Working Group relating to future meeting arrangements
Annexes	Annex A - Draft Schedule of Meetings 2020/21
Recommendation/s	<i>a) That the Council considers the suggestions arising out of the deliberations of the Constitution Working Group relating to future meeting arrangements;</i> <i>b) That, subject to the deliberations of Council, and any agreed amendments, the draft Schedule of Meetings for 2020/21 be approved;</i> <i>c) That the Head of Paid Service be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Chair and Leader of the Council to agree any necessary changes to the Schedule either prior to, or during, the municipal year;</i> <i>d) That the Head of Paid Service be given delegated authority to make any necessary changes to the Constitution arising out of the Council's decisions.</i>
Corporate priorities	Some of the suggestions in respect of meeting arrangements seek to reflect the Principle of promoting a culture of openness and transparency

Key Decision	N/A
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Constitution Working Group and other attending Members, Head of Paid Service, Group Manager Legal/Monitoring Officer.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Council has previously agreed to review its Constitution, and established a Constitution Working Group for this purpose.
- 1.2. There are seven Members on the Working Group - Councillors Patrick Coleman, Mike Evely, Joe Harris and Clive Webster (Liberal Democrat Group representatives); Councillors Julian Beale and Richard Morgan (Conservative Group representatives); and Councillor Nikki Ind (Independent/non-grouped Representative). The Group also agreed that invitations should be extended to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Council and/or Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Council's Committees, should the Group be discussing matters which may benefit from their input.
- 1.3. The Working Group held its first meeting on 22 October 2019 where the parameters of the Group were discussed and agreed. Councillor Joe Harris was elected Chair of the Group. A further meeting was held on 16 December 2019, when the Group focussed on the Council's Procedure Rules - as part of which a number of suggestions were made in relation to future meeting arrangements, which are set out later in this report.
- 1.4. The remaining areas of the Constitution will be reviewed by the Group in the coming weeks, and it is intended that a report will then be presented to the Council Meeting on 25 March, with any suggestions/recommendations from the Group - so that any changes can then be implemented and take effect from the start of the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

2. WORKING GROUP DELIBERATIONS

2.1. Schedule of Meetings

- 2.1.1. The Group considered that, in future, it would be preferable for the Council to approve its schedule of meetings each year; and, ordinarily, for this to occur at the last meeting of Council during the previous calendar year (e.g. November).
- 2.1.2. Given that this timing was not possible for the coming year's schedule, it was suggested that such schedule for 2020/21 should be presented to the January 2020 meeting of Council - and the draft schedule is therefore attached as **Annex A** to this report for consideration. Members will note that the schedule largely reflects this year's programme but does incorporate the Working Group's suggestion that, in addition to its Annual and Budget/Council Tax setting meetings, there should be six ordinary business meetings of the Council.

2.2 Frequency of Council Meetings

2.2.1. As mentioned above, the Working Group felt that there should be formal Council meetings to provide the opportunity for all-member debate (especially for those Members outside of the Cabinet). It was therefore suggested that, in addition to its Annual and Budget/Council Tax setting meetings, there should be six ordinary business meetings of the Council. However, as a result, the February Budget/Council Tax setting meeting would deal solely with budget/Council Tax matters.

2.3. Timing and Duration of Meetings

2.3.1. The Working Group had a lengthy debate on the timing of meetings, and acknowledged that the issue had been the subject of numerous debates over the years, with a divergence of views often being proffered.

2.3.2. It was acknowledged that there was no simple solution that was likely to suit all Members. There were difficulties with day-time meetings for those who worked, and the potential for a loss of public engagement, given that a large percentage of those who worked were unable to attend day-time Meetings. Day-time meetings were known to have discouraged potential candidates from coming forward.

2.3.3. Insofar as evening meetings were concerned, attention was also drawn to the other commitments of Members in evenings, particularly associated with the attendance at Town/Parish Council Meetings, and potential travel issues associated with evening meetings during the winter months. These Members also questioned whether evening Meetings would lead to an increase in public attendance, given past experience, and suggested that attendance was more likely to be based on the business to be transacted rather than the time of the Meeting.

2.3.4. There was no clear majority view, but the Working Group put forward the following suggestions as the basis for Council debate:

- (i) All ordinary meetings of Council and Cabinet to start no earlier than 6 p.m.
- (ii) All ordinary meetings of standing Committees to start no earlier than 4 p.m.
- (iii) Annual meetings of the Council and standing Committees to start no earlier than 2 p.m.
- (iv) Any ad-hoc committees, e.g. Appointments Committee, can start earlier than 4 p.m. with the agreement of both the Chair and Vice-Chair and the Leader or Deputy Leader.

2.3.5. Linked to the suggested change in meeting start times, and by way of acknowledgement of travel distances and times (especially in the winter months), the Working Group have put forward the following suggestions:

- (i) The maximum duration of any one sitting of a meeting to be set at 4 hours - and meetings at the time limit can either be adjourned or the business rescheduled to a subsequent meeting.
- (ii) At the conclusion of an item of business after three hours have elapsed, the meeting must vote by a simple majority to continue for the final hour.

2.3.6. Any agreed changes will not take effect until the new Municipal Year.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. Additional meetings will give rise to the potential for increased expenditure by way of mileage claims. However, by scheduling the additional ordinary Council meeting on the same day as the Annual Council Meeting, the proposals should be cost neutral.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The Constitution is a legal document which supplements legislative provisions in respect of the governance arrangements and methods of working of the authority. It is based largely on a modular version.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. There are no key risks expected to arise from this item. However, the Council has a general duty of care to its Members and Officers, which should be borne in mind.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 6.1. Not required as a whole - however, individual proposals may require an analysis to be carried out.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None specific.
- 7.2. Additional meetings will give rise to an increase in car journeys, and an increase in emissions. However, by scheduling the additional ordinary Council meeting on the same day as the Annual Council Meeting, the proposals should be neutral.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1. The Council could continue with the existing arrangements; or put forward and alternative or hybrid alternative.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1. The following document has been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and is listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- The Council Constitution

- 9.2. This document will be available for inspection at the Council Offices at Trinity Road, Cirencester, GL7 1PX during normal office hours for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting. Please contact the author of the report.

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