
FREQUENCY OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

REPORT OF THE COUNTY CLERK AND MONITORING OFFICER

AGENDA ITEM: 5

Reason for the Report

1. The Constitution Committee at its last meeting on 22 January 2014 considered the current Programme of council meetings and resolved to consult with the Leader and Chairs of the various council committees on a proposal to reduce the frequency of Council and committee meetings scheduled in the Council's Calendar of Meetings for 2014/15.

Background

2. Elected Members face increasing and complex challenges, and there are heightened expectations on them and their time to undertake a diversity of roles, ranging from that of community leader, to their special responsibilities within the Council. Cardiff Council itself is facing profound challenges seeking to deliver an ambitious vision for the City against a serious funding gap.
3. A recent survey of all members highlighted the time pressures on members with the achievement of a work life balance seen as a priority area for improvement amongst a number of respondents and this was echoed in the reasoning behind why a number of Members were unable to participate in training and development sessions.

Issues

4. The Council's Constitution and governance structure is in line with good practice and designed to enable decisions to be taken efficiently and effectively within a framework that holds decision makers to public account. Whilst there is no need for any immediate changes to deal with the financial pressures, there is scope to encourage Members and Officers to reduce the number, size and length of meetings which take up so much time and energy.

5. At its last meeting the Committee noted that Cardiff operates a programme of:
- 11 Full Council meetings each year;
 - a monthly cycle of Regulatory Committees (Planning/Licensing & Public Protection);
 - 11 monthly meetings of the five Scrutiny Committees;
 - other Committees of Council which meet on bi monthly or quarterly basis (such as Constitution Committee);; and
 - other meetings including Joint Scrutiny meetings, call in meetings, Appointment Committees and Council Appeals Committees as and when required.

Annex B to the report sets out the programme of meetings for 2013/14.

6. Based on a comparative study of other councils across the UK the Committee agreed to consult on the indicative schedule attached as Annex C. The main changes reflected in the indicative calendar include:
- Reducing the number of Full Council meetings to nine;
 - Quarterly meetings of Standards & Ethics, Constitution, Corporate Parenting Panel and the Democratic Services Committees;
 - Five annual meetings of the Audit Committee; and
 - Removal of the May Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Consultation with the Committee Chairs

7. Annex A sets out the view of committee chairs who have responded to date to the consultation. At a meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs on the 12 March 2014, it was recognised that the Scrutiny committees have differing constraints affecting their workloads and as such it would be better to continue to schedule 11 meetings a year but that committees would have discretion as to whether they took up all the sessions.
8. The Committee are also asked to note that a new programme of neighbourhood Partnership meetings involving members has also been recently agreed to take place 4 times a year across the 6 Partnership areas

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

9. Welsh Government has issued guidance under section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. By virtue of section 6(2) of the Measure, Local Authorities must have regard to this guidance when considering the times

and intervals at which meetings of a local authority are held. A copy of the relevant chapter of the guidance is at Annex D.

10. In summary, the guidance points out that:
- work and other commitments makes setting a programme of meetings that suits all Members difficult;
 - Welsh Government does not wish to proscribe the number/timings of meetings; and
 - it is important that Authorities proactively review their meeting arrangements, by way of example the guidance states that “What may have been tradition or an arrangement which suited the previous generation of councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the new intake.”

Benefits of Reducing the Frequency of Meetings

11. It is likely that there would be a number of benefits arising from a reduction in frequency of meetings, including:
- More time being available for Members to spend on constituency or other work;
 - More officer time available for other governance and statutory tasks and, dependent on the level of reduction, potential for efficiency savings;
 - Reductions in external costs for meetings;
 - Whilst the Council is committed to move away from a paper dependent Council and Committee system in the interest of cost management there will be some level of savings on the provision of paper copies for Council meetings.
 - Fewer meetings for Members to travel to, with a potential consequential saving in mileage allowances and travelling time.
12. In the light of the above and in these austere times, it is appropriate to challenge historical assumptions in respect of the frequency of meetings. However, care must be taken in order to ensure that fewer meetings would not lead to:
- Too much business on the agendas of the remaining meetings, impacting on the length of meetings and the decision making process; or
 - A delay in the consideration of business, which would prevent important decisions being made in a timely way.

Reasons for Recommendations

13. On the basis of the consultation and the additional meetings being added to the Meeting Schedule It is proposed that the Committee considers a reduction in the number of full Council meetings for 2014/15.

Legal Implications

14. The statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Government under Section 6(1) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to survey its Members at the beginning of the administration in respect of times and interval in which meetings of the local authority are held. This exercise was completed in May 2012.
15. The Council Procedure Rules provide that the Council's programme of Council and Committee meetings shall be set by the Council.

Financial Implications

16. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however any proposal to reduce the frequency of meetings could result in some reduction in costs to the Council. These costs can be quantified if a proposal was to be put forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is requested to:

- a) Note the Report and the outcome of the consultation exercise and
- b) Consider whether it wishes to recommend any changes to the current programme

MARIE ROSENTHAL

County Clerk and Monitoring Officer
13 March 2014

Annex A – Survey of Committee Chairs

Annex B - Calendar of Meetings 2013/14

Annex C – Calendar of Meetings Reduced Frequency 2014/15

Annex D - Statutory Guidance on the Local Government Measure 2011 (Chapter 1)

FREQUENCY OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

ANNEX A

NAME	COMMENTS
<p>Cllr Michael Michael, Chair, Planning Committee.</p>	<p>Thank you for your regarding the number of council meetings we presently have, I would suggest that we can cut the number of full meetings of the council without the loss of any work that needs to be sent to council, I would further suggest that we should look at the half terms and holidays that may tie in with our meetings, I further believe that we can replicate the assembly and miss out on a July council meeting as well as a December one and possibly another in October, As far as Planning is concerned we meet every month as well as having specials when and if we need that as our work load is increasing.</p>
<p>Cllr. P. Mitchell, Chair Environmental Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Apart from the cost argument, I feel that the status quo should apply. The Scrutiny cycles in particular can only investigate a part of the business and its functionality would be served well by cuts especially in such difficult times.</p>
<p>Cllr Gretta Marshall, Chair of Public Protection Committee and Chair of Licensing Committee</p>	<p>I agree with all proposals to reduce meetings ie to 10 Council etc except the removal of Scrutiny in June but would not be adverse to removal over the Easter period.</p>
<p>Sir Jon Shortridge Chair of Audit Committee</p>	<p>I am content with the proposed 5 Audit Committee meetings per year. This would bring us into line with other organisations in both the private and public sector.</p>
<p>Cllr Jonathan Evans Chair Corporate Parenting Panel Labour and Co-operative – Llafur a Chydweithredol</p>	<p>What follows is an essentially personal view, but I should indicate that I have sought the views of all members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. This email will focus primarily on the frequency of meetings in respect of the Corporate Parenting Panel. This is because I believe the workload of committees and panels should have direct influence on the frequency of other meetings (including Full Council).</p> <p>At the outset it should be acknowledged that colleagues expressed a range of views on the number of times our Panel should meet. Some believed the status quo worked well. Others could see the respective virtues for increasing and decreasing the number of meetings. One pragmatic response was that three or four meetings could be scheduled, but discretion should be</p>

	<p>permitted for additional <i>ad hoc</i> meetings when specific issues needed to be addressed. Another colleague suggested we evaluate evidence from other local authorities where Corporate Parenting Panels are deemed to be effective.</p> <p>My view, which was shared by some of my colleagues, is that we need to clarify the status, purpose, function and workload of the Panel before making any definitive statements on the frequency question. The constitutional relationship between the Panel, Cabinet and Children & Young People’s Scrutiny Committee is particularly important. Personally, I think the status and powers of the Panel should be enhanced. If this were to be accepted, then it would be logical to increase the number of meetings and increase the workload. You will be aware of the fact that a joint Task & Finish Inquiry with our colleagues on the Children & Young People’s Scrutiny Committee has been established to address these very issues. We are due to meet and report back in March. At the time of writing it would be premature to anticipate the findings of the said Inquiry.</p> <p>I trust the above comments are of some assistance to you in your deliberations. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.</p>
<p>Paul Stockton MBE Chair, Standards & Ethics Committee</p>	<p>I read the report with interest and thank you for the opportunity to respond to the report.</p> <p>The committee has not had the opportunity to discuss a response collectively and therefore the response is purely mine, based on 8 years of working with the committee and officers.</p> <p>I have concerns regarding the proposal to keep the frequency of Standards and Ethics committee meetings to 4 per year. It takes on average three meetings for an issue to be resolved via the committee and I am concerned that this will delay the work programme unnecessarily.</p> <p>I appreciate the comments regarding informal groups being set up to consider progressing the work plan in between each scheduled meeting however, for a S&E committee to maintain its profile and progress its work plan, and also respond to arising issues, i would prefer to have regular (and shorter, more focussed) meetings. The committee went through a period a couple of years ago, where our meetings were held every other month and this really focussed the committee and progressed their work plan well.</p>

ANNEX B

* Annual Council 23 May 2013

** Annual Council proposed 29 May 2014

CALENDAR OF MEETING 2013/14														
Meeting	2013								2014					Total
	*May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	**May	
Council	23/5	27/6	25/7	x	26/9	24/10 (Ord & Ext)	21/11	19/12	30/01	27/2	27/3	17/4	29/5	12
Cabinet	x	19/6 26/6	11/7 22/7	x	12/9 23/9	10/10	7/11	9/12 16/12	16/1 29/1	20/2	13/3	10/4	15/4	16
Planning	x	12/6	17/7	14/8	11/9	9/10	13/11	11/12	15/1	12/2	12/3	9/4	14/5	12
Licensing	x	x	x	6/8	12/9	1/10	x	x	x	x	4/3	x	x	4
Licensing Sub (No)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(2)	(2)	(3)	(2)	(2)	(3)	(2)	(3)	(3)	(3)	30
Public Protection	x	3/6 5/6	x	6/8	12/9	1/10	5/11	3/12	7/1	4/2	4/3	1/4	6/5	12
Constitution	x	x	10/7	x	18/9	x	6/11	x	22/1	x	19/3	x	x	5
Employment Conditions	x	19/6 27/6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	2
Council Appeals	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	(1)	x	x	x	x	1
Audit	x	x	8/7	x	16/9	x	x	2/12	20/1	x	24/3	x	x	5
Standards & Ethics	x	x	16/7	x	x	15/10	x	12/12	28/01	x	18/3	x	x	5
Democratic Services	x	x	19/7	x	x	2/10	x	11/12	x	5/2	x	2/4	x	5
Corporate Parenting Panel	x	x	10/7	x	17/9	x	12/11	x	21/1	x	18/3	x	20/5	6
Appointments Committee	x	x	x	x	(2)	(3)	(3)	(2)	x	x	x	x	x	10
Works Council	x	19/6	x	x	18/9	x	x	12/12	x	x	19/3	x	x	4
Health & Safety	x	x	17/7	x	13/9	x	x	10/12	x	x	(1)	x	x	4

Meeting	2013								2014					Total
	*May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	**May	
Children & Young People SC	x	11/6	9/7	x	3/9 10/9	8/10	5/11	13/12	14/1	13/2	11/3	8/4	13/5	12
Community & Adult Services SC	x	18/6	23/7	x	4/9	2/10 30/10	27/11	4/12	8/1	12/2	5/3	2/4	7/5	12
Economy & Culture SC	x	6/6	4/7	x	5/9	3/10 31/10	28/11	x	9/1	10/2	6/3	3/4	8/5	12
Environmental SC	x	4/6	2/7 22/7	x	5/9	8/10	12/11	10/12	14/1	11/2	11/3	8/4	8/5	12
Policy Review & Performance SC	x	5/6 18/6	9/7	x	12/9	1/10 15/10 29/10	26/11	x	7/1	13/2	4/3	1/4	6/5	13
Joint Scrutiny	x	x	3/7	x	x	x	x	4/12	x	x	x	x	x	2
Scrutiny Sub	x	x	x	x	10/9	x	x	x	(1)	x	x	x	x	2
Total Number of Meetings														183

* Annual Council proposed 29 May 2014

** Annual Council proposed 21 May 2015

†† Indicative dates

ANNEX C

Meeting	DRAFT INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2014/15 (REDUCED FREQUENCY)													Total
	Indicative meetings 2014							2015						
	*May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	**May	
Council ††	29/5	26/6	24/7	x	25/9	30/10	X	11/12	29/01	26/02	x	16/04	21/05	9
Cabinet		√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	10
Planning DC		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	12
Licensing		x	√	x	√	x	√	x	√	x	x	√	x	5
Licensing Sub		(2)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	23
Public Protection		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	12
Constitution		√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	4
Employment Conditions														1
Council Appeals														3
Audit		√	x	x	√	x	x	√	√	x	√	x	x	5
Standards & Ethics		x	√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	4
Democratic Services		√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	4
Corporate Parenting Panel		√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	4
Works Council		x	√	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	4
Health & Safety AC		x	√	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	√	x	x	4
Appointments Committee														Adhoc
Children & Young People SC		√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	11
Community & Adult Services SC		√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	11
Economy & Culture SC		√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	11
Environmental SC		√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	11
Policy Review & Performance SC		√	√	x	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	11
Joint Scrutiny		x	√	x	x	x	x	√	x	x	x	x	x	2
Total Number of Meetings													161	

Chapter 1 Timing Of Council Meetings

Statutory Guidance made under Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Introduction

1.1 Part 1 of the Measure contains provisions related to the strengthening of local democracy. More specifically, Chapter 1 of this Part deals with “promoting and supporting membership of local authorities” and section 6 relates to the timing of meetings.

1.2 These provisions flowed from proposals developed in the report of the Councillor Commission Expert Panel *Wales Are We Being Served?* published in 2009. It included a number of recommendations aimed at making local government service more attractive to a more diverse cross-section of the adult population. These included laying greater emphasis on the roles of “backbench” councillors, including through the introduction of remote access to council meetings, a review of councillors’ time commitments, a bi-annual survey to establish councillors’ support needs and engaging with employers to try and attract more candidates from the employed workforce.

1.3 In this context, the times at which meetings of the local authority take place is of considerable significance as it can affect the extent to which individuals may contemplate standing for election.

What the Measure requires

1.4 This is statutory guidance issued in accordance with section 6 (1) of the Measure. By virtue of section 6 (2) of the Measure, local authorities must have regard to this guidance in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings of a local authority are held. The relevant meetings in the context of this guidance are meetings of the full council and any committee or sub-committee of the council.

Reviewing existing arrangements

1.5 Only members of council executives are considered to be “full-time” councillors and this is reflected in the levels of payments that they are currently entitled to for their special responsibilities. By contrast, non-executive members are considered to undertake the equivalent of a part-time role, which will, in many cases, need to be fitted around whatever other commitments councillors may have.

1.6 The Expert Panel found that, although many councillors are retired, others had difficulty in marrying their work commitments with those of their council duties, or, in other cases, did so at the expense of any meaningful personal time.

1.7 For many prospective councillors in full-time employment, the extent to which their employers are supportive of their new commitment is a vital concern. Although

employment legislation¹ entitles councillors to time off for public duties, operating that in practice may be more difficult.

1.8 The timing and frequency of meetings is the most problematic issue in this respect. Other duties may be fulfilled at times which suit the individual but a meeting is at a set time and (subject to any arrangements made for remote attendance) at a set venue.

1.9 It is neither practical nor desirable for the Welsh Government to prescribe the times and frequency of meetings of the full council, committees and sub-committees as these are matters for each local authority to consider in individual circumstances. However, it is important that local authorities do not simply continue to hold their meetings at the same time as they always have done simply out of inertia. What may have been tradition or an arrangement which suited the previous generation of councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the new intake.

1.10 All local authorities should review the times at which meetings are held at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new council is elected. The rule of thumb should be that meetings will be held at times, intervals and locations which are convenient to its members and as far as is practicable have regard to equality and diversity issues. Councils should find ways of surveying their members, at least after each election, to assess their preferences and should be committed to act on the conclusions. The survey should be carried out within three months of ordinary elections. It will be for each authority to decide on the regularity of such surveys.

1.11 Although this process could result in long-serving councillors having to make changes to their pattern of working that would be worth doing if it meant that the council was better able to retain new councillors with outside responsibilities.

1.12 Issues to be taken into account in conducting a survey could include:

- Whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred.
- Whether particular times cause difficulties for councillors with particular characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, having caring responsibilities or being in employment.

1.13 As a result of the survey, local authorities should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of pleasing all their members all of the time. Any such arrangements will, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public.

¹ Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (1996 c18)