

North Tyneside Council

Report to Council

Date: 26 January 2012

ITEM 11

Title: Programme of Meetings 2012/13

Portfolio(s): Elected Mayor

Cabinet Member(s): Mrs Linda Arkley

Report from Directorate: Legal, Governance and Commercial Services, Chief Executive's Office

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Wards affected: All

PART 1

1.1 Purpose:

This report presents a draft programme of Council and committee meetings for the 2012/13 municipal year, together with options as to the commencement time for meetings.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Council:

- (1) agree the programme of meetings for 2012/13, as set out in Appendix A to this report;
- (2) authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with Group Leaders, to select a number of committees to commence their meetings at 4.00pm during 2012/13 on a trial basis; and
- (3) agree that the meetings of the full Council proposed for 26 July 2012, 29 November 2012 and 14 March 2013 be those at which questions will be taken from members of the public.

1.3 Forward Plan:

This report appears on the Forward Plan for the period 1 January to 30 April 2012.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report has no direct relevance to the Council Strategic Plan priorities.

1.5 Information:

- 1.5.1 The Council is requested to consider a programme of meetings of the Council and its committees for the 2012/13 municipal year, attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The Council's constitution states that where possible the Council will set a programme of ordinary meetings of its committees and sub-committees for each year ahead. The timetable of meetings is normally agreed each year at the January Council meeting to allow Members and officers to plan ahead.
- 1.5.2 The draft programme provides for:-
- a) a timetable of meetings of the Council and its overview and scrutiny, regulatory and other committees and sub-committees and area forums. The dates of Cabinet meetings are included in the timetable for information. These are determined by the Elected Mayor;
 - b) a minimal number of meetings being scheduled in August; in the last 2 weeks of December; no meetings on Maundy Thursday, or other key religious days;
 - c) more frequent meetings of Planning Committee in September 2012 to consider planning applications in relation to the Quality Homes for Older People Project;
 - d) two member briefings per month, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. No briefings to be held before Council meetings; and
 - e) member development including the provision of training for quasi-judicial committees taking place between the Annual Council Meeting and the first meeting of these committees.
- 1.5.3 The Area Housing Forums will be asked to determine a programme of meetings for 2012/13 at their meetings during January and February 2012, taking into account the dates of the committees as determined by Council tonight.
- 1.5.4 The Council is requested to specify those Council meetings during the year at which questions from members of the public will be taken. For Members' information, in the current municipal year, three meetings were specified for that purpose, ie those meetings held in July 2011, November 2011 and March 2012.
- 1.5.5 Whilst over recent years the Council, has reviewed the commencement time of its meetings, most continue to meet at 6.00pm, outside of normal office hours. This has financial implications in relation to hosting and supporting meetings at these times and human resource implications in terms of the work life balance of employees. Details of these implications are set out in Part 2 of this report.
- 1.5.6 The Council should also note that overall there are more meetings contained within the 2012/13 programme, compared to last year, due to the increase in the frequency of scrutiny sub-committee meetings arising from the review of the overview and scrutiny arrangements. If most committees continue to meet at 6.00pm there will be more meetings than available evenings. Consequently more than one meeting will have to be held on some evenings. These occurrences are highlighted in bold in Appendix A. The evening commencement times of Area Forums, Area Housing Forums and alternate

Member Briefing and Member Development sessions has resulted in significant pressure on the timetable, sometimes leading to clashes of meetings.

1.5.7 The Council is therefore asked to give consideration to the timing of committee meetings, taking into account the implications of continuing to meet at 6.00pm and members' availability and preferences.

1.6 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Council:

Option 1

To agree the dates of meetings of the Council and its Committees for the 2012/13 municipal year as set out in Appendix 1 and

- a) the first meeting of each committee in the new municipal year be held at its traditional commencement time;
- b) each committee and sub-committee be asked to determine at its first meeting in the new municipal year, the commencement time of its future meetings, taking into account the factors set out in this report; and
- c) the Council will continue to meet at 6.00pm in accordance with the Constitution.

Option 2

To agree the dates of meetings of the Council and its Committees for the 2012/13 municipal year as set out in Appendix 1 and authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with Group Leaders, to select a number of committees to commence their meetings at 4.00pm during 2012/13 on a trial basis.

Option 2 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 2 is recommended for the following reasons:

- A more varied approach to the timing of meetings will suit the different preferences and availability of councillors, officers and members of the public;
- Varied commencement times will relieve the pressure on scheduling an increased number of committee meetings in a finite number of evenings;
- Financial savings may be achieved from reduced catering and facilities management costs;
- There will be a reduction in the number of hours and evenings, officers are required to work, thereby enhancing their work life balance.
- The re-scheduling of a select number of committees will provide an opportunity to assess the impact of earlier committee meetings in terms of organisational effectiveness, financial savings, equalities and work life balance. This information may be then taken into account in determining the 2013/14 programme of meetings.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Programme of meetings of the Council and its committees for the 2012/13 municipal year.

1.9 Contact officers:

David Brown, Democratic Services Manager (0191) 643 5358
Alison Campbell, Finance Business Manager (0191) 643 7038

1.10 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

- (1) Report to Council on the Programme of Council meetings – 20 January 2011
- (2) Report of the Organisational Effectiveness Sub-Committee – November 2008
- (3) Council Constitution
- (4) Estimates of Catering Costs and Officer Hours

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

The requirement to hold most committee and sub-committee meetings in the evening has an impact in terms of catering and facilities management.

It is estimated that the catering costs associated the committee meetings held in 2012/13 will amount to £27,000 and can be contained within current budgets. A reduction in the number of meetings held in the evening would reduce catering costs.

There are also indirect facilities management costs associated with the operation of Quadrant outside core office hours relating to security, health and safety, technical support, heating and lighting. All such expenditure will continue to be met from existing budgets.

The Council's work-life balance policy sets out that the Council recognises its responsibilities in assisting employees to balance their work and home life whilst meeting the needs of service delivery and fulfilling its obligation to equality by dealing with employees in a fair and consistent manner. It is recognised that effective practices to promote work-life balance will benefit not only employees but also the Council and the communities it serves.

As the majority of committee and sub-committee meetings currently commence at 6:00pm there are implications in terms of work-life balance for those officers who are frequently required to attend and support evening meetings. It is estimated that if the committees and sub committees which currently start their meetings at 6.00pm continue to meet at 6.00pm in 2012-13, officers would work an equivalent of 300 working days (2171 hours) attending or supporting evening meetings during the municipal year.

2.2 Legal

The Council's Constitution requires a programme of ordinary meetings of the Council for the year to be approved by the Council. The Council has agreed that the timetable of meetings of the Council and its committees/sub committees should be agreed each year at the

January Council meeting to allow Members and officers to plan ahead and to enable the decision making processes to be complied with.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

Consultation on the timing of meetings and briefings was undertaken by the former Organisational Effectiveness Sub-committee in 2008 by way of a survey of all Councillors and co-opted members seeking their views and preferences.

Consultation on the proposed timetable of meetings for 2012/13 has taken place with Group Leaders, the Elected Mayor, Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Section 151 Officer, Heads of Service and officers within Democratic Services, Financial Services, Internal Audit, Performance and Scrutiny, North Tyneside Homes and Community Engagement.

2.4 Human rights

There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

In considering the programme of meetings consideration has been given to the impact in terms of equality of access for Members, potential new members, the public and staff. In 2008 the former Organisational Effectiveness Sub-committee undertook research with Members which indicated a majority of Members find meetings most accessible if they are held in the evening, especially Members who are in paid employment. However, a large minority of Members indicated that they would prefer to attend meetings during the day. A number of members have expressed a preference for more daytime meetings during the course of 2011/12.

In drafting the schedule of meetings, the Council has previously agreed that committee and sub-committee meetings should not be scheduled on religious days. The draft schedule attached at Appendix 1 has been drawn up on the basis that no meetings are held on the most significant religious days of the majority religion in North Tyneside on the basis of population data from the census.

To date the Council has not undertaken any research on the accessibility of meetings to the public or how the timing of meetings impacts on accessibility for different sectors of society. It is suggested that if the Council agree to a selection of committees meeting at 4.00pm, the Head of Legal, Governance and Commercial Services should examine the impact of the trial on access to the democratic decision making processes by members of the public.

2.6 Risk management

A risk assessment has not been undertaken in respect to the formulation of the programme of meetings. The risks associated with human resources policies and equalities and diversity are addressed in the report.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no environment and sustainability implications arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Strategic Director with Responsibility for Community Engagement