

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Council	26 October 2006
<b>AUTHOR/S:</b>	Chief Executive and Democratic Services Manager	

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### **PROGRAMME OF COUNCIL MEETINGS FOR THE 2007-2008 CIVIC YEAR**

#### **Purpose**

1. To determine the programme of Council meetings for 2007/08.

#### **Effect on Corporate Objectives**

2. The scheduling of an appropriate number of Council meetings at which the policy and budgetary frameworks are established (and amended where necessary) and other business dealt with in accordance with Article 4 of the Constitution, is essential to the efficient and effective operation of the whole organisation. The proposal to reduce the number of Council meetings to six per year, if agreed, will free up senior Officer time to concentrate on the strategic and operational challenges facing the Council and to allow it to meet its medium and long term corporate objectives.

#### **Background**

3. In 2006/07 Council has been programmed to meet every fourth Thursday in the month, except for August and December, for normal Council business.
4. As part of its consideration of the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy at the meeting on 12 October 2006, Cabinet agreed in principle that the number of meetings be reduced to 50% of current levels. In accordance with this principle this report seeks a reduction of the number of Council meetings from ten to six (see paragraph 7 below).

#### **Considerations**

5. The monthly schedule could continue or, in the interests of reducing the number of meetings, alternatives could be considered. A number of our neighbouring Councils meet on a roughly two monthly cycle.
6. It is essential that Council meet in May to make its appointments for the following year (the 'Annual Meeting'). In years where elections are held the Annual Meeting must be held within 21 days of the retirement of outgoing Councillors (Schedule 12, Local Government Act 1972). Council must also meet in February to approve the budget and set the Council Tax. During the rest of the year the Council will conduct its ordinary business, largely consisting of consideration of recommendations from Cabinet in respect of plans comprising the policy framework, and any matters which would involve a departure from the budget and policy framework. The Council meeting needs also to retain its role as a forum for public and Member debate of the key issues affecting the district, through the submission of questions and Motions.

#### **Options**

7. It is proposed that ordinary meetings be scheduled quarterly during the 2007-2008 Civic Year, along with Annual Meetings in May 2007 and 2008 and a meeting to set the budget in February 2008.

Date	Type of meeting
24 May 2007	Annual (within 21 days of the retirement of outgoing Councillors)
26 July 2007	Ordinary
25 October 2007	Ordinary
31 January 2008	Ordinary
28 February 2008	Budget
24 April 2008	Ordinary
22 May 2008	Annual (within 21 days of the retirement of outgoing Councillors)

8. Whilst the number of ordinary meetings has been reduced from eight to four, it is worth noting that there is no restriction on ordinary business being conducted at the budget meeting. Furthermore, the Constitution allows the Annual Meeting to 'consider any business set out in the notice convening the meeting', which would allow items other than appointments to be considered.
9. If the option of fewer Council meetings is adopted, there will be a need for consideration of further delegated powers so that delays are not caused to essential projects. If the recommendation is agreed this issue would be considered by the Constitution Review Working Group, with recommendations to Council as appropriate.

### **Financial Implication**

10. A reduction in the number of meetings would reduce the costs of Members' travel by around £1500 (based on four fewer meetings and average costs of £375 per meeting), but other costs attributed to Council meetings would remain unless the reduction was such that the number of staff was reduced and/or the accommodation could be used for other purposes. As stated above the key savings would be generated through the freeing-up of Officer time to concentrate on delivering the Council's aims and objectives.

### **Legal Implications**

11. As referred to above, there is a legal requirement for the whole Council to meet at certain times to carry out functions only it can perform such as appointing the executive and committees, deciding the budget and approving the Performance Plan. There is no laid-down number of other ordinary meetings.

### **Staffing Implications**

12. Fewer meetings would release staff, Chief Officers in particular, to carry out other of their duties.

### **Risk Management Implications**

13. As long as the programme allows Council to undertake its required duties, there is no significant risk associated with the proposed reduction. The main risk with a reduced

number of scheduled meetings is a higher likelihood of additional extraordinary meetings being required.

### **Consultations**

14. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee has previously supported a reduction in the overall number of meetings in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making.

### **Recommendation**

15. Council is asked to resolve that meetings during the 2007-2008 Civic Year be scheduled as follows:

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24 May 2007	Annual (within 21 days of the retirement of outgoing Councillors)
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25 October 2007	Ordinary
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**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Article 4 of the Constitution: the Full Council Meeting

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