

# SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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REPORT TO

Council

26th February 2004

AUTHOR/S:

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## PROGRAMME OF COUNCIL MEETINGS 2004/05

### Purpose

1. To put the recommendations of the Constitution Review Working Party on the frequency, programme and timing of Council meetings to council for consideration.

### Effect on Corporate Objectives

2. Although the proposals do not have a direct effect on the Corporate Objectives, they aim to assist members of the Council in taking a full part in the business of the Council and providing a good service to their constituents.

### Background

3. At the last meeting, Council decided that, in view of the timing of the local elections, the annual meeting of the Council in 2004 would be held on Thursday, 24th June. A programme needs to be agreed for the rest of the municipal year.
4. The Constitution Review Working Party has, meanwhile, been looking at the role of the Council meeting as part of its remit.
5. The Working Party was asked by Council to look at ways in which the Statement of Accounts can be approved since this is not something the executive can do and the last approval date is moving earlier to 30th June over three years.

### Considerations

6. Views put forward to the Working Party include that non-executive members perceive that there is no role for them at Council as decisions have already been taken. It was suggested that there are insufficient Council meetings, leaving them congested with agreeing minutes with no time for policy and strategy debate, while at the same time there are too many additional briefings and special meetings. Ways of addressing these issues were considered.

### Frequency and Programme of Meetings

7. The number of meetings to which all councillors have been invited was reviewed and it was noted that there had been 17 such meetings or presentations during the past year. It was felt that it would be more helpful for members to have meetings programmed in advance to which most of additional matters could be brought. The Working Party generally agreed that more programmed Council meetings are required; the question was how many? Two main alternatives were put forward:

- that a date be earmarked each month for a meeting on council business, letting the business to be conducted determine the nature of the meeting, i.e. normal Council business, policy discussion or presentation
  - that normal Council business should be conducted each month and other matters to be debated added to the agenda
8. The Working Party took into account the impact of monthly meetings on Chief Officers and the suggestion that certain dates should be set as “ordinary meetings of Council”, but recommended the first option.
9. The Working Party recommend that meetings be programmed for the same Thursday in each month and, bearing in mind the wish of Cabinet to meet on the 2nd Thursday and Scrutiny Committee on the 3rd, recommend that Council normally meet on the 4th Thursday in the month. The dates this produces are:
- 2004 22nd July  
 23rd September  
 28th October  
 25th November
- 2005 27th January  
 24th February  
 24th March (Maundy Thursday)  
 28th April  
 26th May (Annual Meeting)

#### Statement of Accounts

10. Approval of the Statement of Accounts must be agreed by 31st August in 2004, 31st July in 2005 and 30th June in 2006. The Working Party considered inviting Council to delegate the function to the members of the Audit Panel, but concluded that this is a matter which should be dealt with by Council itself. For 2004 only this will require a meeting of Council in August. The 4th Thursday would be the 26th.

#### Timing of Meetings

11. The Working Party discussed the starting times of meetings, largely to try to assist those councillors who work full time or have children, and a survey of staff views on issues which would have to be taken into account in supporting later meetings was undertaken. The results were reported back and points made in discussion included:
- Approximate end times on agendas may encourage more councillors to attend
  - Later meetings will tend to clash with councillors’ other public duties, for example at Parish Council meetings
  - Individual contracts of employment varied and would need to be checked; flexi time could not be implemented overall to cover extra hours
  - Once the Council has moved to Cambourne, it will be more difficult for officers and members alike to use public transport to get home after a late meeting

- There is an associated cost with late meetings, security and house keeping costs for example
  - Evening meetings had been tried at South Cambridgeshire District Council several years ago and it was found that 7pm seemed to be a trigger point for people having to leave evening meetings.
12. Ultimately, by 5 votes to 1, the Working Party recommended no change at this time, but that times be reviewed after a year in the new offices. This does not prevent any constituent part of the Council from changing its own starting time.

#### Procedures at Council Meetings

13. In further consideration of ensuring the relevance of Council meetings, the Working Party recommends that the agenda should contain a slot for questions to each portfolio holder.
14. In addition, the Working Party recommends that, to speed the process without denying any opportunity for members to raise issues, the minutes of meetings of Cabinet and committees should be presented by title and date only, rather than page by page. Members would be asked to state the page and item number of any matter they wish to raise.

#### Financial Implications

15. No significant implications since the number of meetings should not exceed the number now, in practice, called.

#### Legal Implications

16. None

#### Staffing Implications

17. If monthly meetings all require the attendance of the whole of Management Team this will be an additional time constraint on them.

#### Consultations

18. Officers affected have been consulted about the timing of meetings and their frequency.

#### Recommendations

19. The recommendations of the Working Party are:
- (a) that meetings for the conduct of business for the whole Council should be programmed for once each month other than (normally) August and December

- (b) that for 2004 only, an extraordinary meeting of Council be held in August to approve the Statement of Accounts; in other years approval should be taken to a regular meeting
- (c) that meetings should be programmed for the 4th Thursday in each month, as indicated in paragraph.. above
- (d) that timings of meetings be reviewed one year after the office move to Cambourne
- (e) that the Council agenda should contain a slot for questions to each portfolio holder.
- (f) that the minutes of meetings of Cabinet and committees should be presented at Council by title and date only, rather than page by page

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Reports to and minutes of the Constitution Review Working Party

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