

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

13 February 2024

Calendar of Meetings 2024-2025

Report of: David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance

Report Reference No: CP/63/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report seeks agreement of the Committee in respect of a draft calendar of meetings for the Council for the municipal year 2024/25 and a draft calendar of dates for the period June to October 2025. Full Council will then be asked to formally approve the calendar at the Council meeting on 27 February 2024.

Executive Summary

- 2 In accordance the Local Government Act 1972, the Council is required to give public notice of its meetings. The calendar of meetings assists in fulfilling this legal obligation and provides certainty for Council members.
- 3 Having an approved and published calendar of meetings enables effective business planning and decision-making procedures.
- 4 At its meeting held on [13 December 2023](#), in relation to item 9: Review of the Committee System and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Saving, Full Council resolved that:
 - 4 *the functions of the Scrutiny Committee, Audit and Governance Committee and any other committee, sub-committee, panel or working group are reviewed to consider opportunities for streamlining and efficacy of delivery. The outcome of the review is presented to an all-member briefing in February 2024. Please see full resolution of Council [Minute Council 13 Dec 2023](#)*

- 5 Upon conclusion of the review of the committee structure, the calendar of meetings will be amended if this is required. In the meantime, in order to give as much certainty as possible to Members, officers and the public, it is appropriate to approve the calendar of meetings, based upon the existing committee structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the draft calendar of meetings for Cheshire East Council for the municipal year 2024/25 be recommended to Council for approval, subject to delegated powers being granted to the Director of Governance and Compliance, in consultation with committee chairs and vice chairs, to make any changes to the calendar of meetings which might arise from the review of the committee structure.

Background

- 6 As set out in its Constitution (Chapter 3 – Part 1 para 1.1) the Council is required to decide when its meetings will take place. These are set out in a calendar of meetings. The calendar of meetings is intended only to deal with formal decision-making meetings and, therefore, does not provide details of other meetings involving Members.
- 7 Full Council must approve the calendar.
- 8 Following the Corporate Policy Committee held on [23 March 2023](#), the Constitution Working Group has undertaken a Survey to seek Members' opinion on the appetite for twilight / early evening meetings (4pm or 6pm), alongside meetings held during normal working hours. 71% of all Councillors that completed the survey would prefer committee meetings to start in the daytime at 10am or 2pm, with 24% of Councillors expressing a preference for committee meetings to start from 6pm onwards. Bearing in mind that committee chairs can agree changes to the start times of meetings if required, The Working Group concluded that the timing of meetings should remain unchanged.
- 9 Further consultation with the administration has requested consideration is given to each service committee having one twilight meeting. This would require 7 meetings to be moved to a 4-6pm start time.
- 10 Furthermore, there would be financial implications if twilight or evening meetings were to be introduced. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 required a budget saving of £135,000 in relation to the cost of democracy. Following the decision of council to reverse the earlier

decision to reduce the number of planning committees this saving has not been met. The exact cost of twilight or evening meetings will be dependent on how the building is used, length of meeting and the number of necessary staff. The additional costs will comprise an hourly business support staffing charge of £25.21 per hour for all meetings held after 7pm at Westfields, Municipal Buildings, Crewe and Delamere House, Crewe and after 5pm at Macclesfield Town Hall. Any staff grade 8 and under in attendance at meetings would be entitled to claim overtime and there are also facilities costs associated with keeping the buildings open for longer.

- 11 Due to the potential costs for twilight/evening meetings and the clear policy decision to reduce the cost of democracy officers are not able to recommend the introduction of evening meetings. However, Council may consider trialling a twilight meeting during the forthcoming Municipal Year, in order to establish whether this might be a favourable option for Members and members of the public in the future.
- 12 The scheduling of meetings has taken into account the Council's business planning/performance reporting cycle, together with a range of additional issues arising from the implementation of the committee system and learning from its operation since May 2021.
- 13 Where possible August has been retained for recess, except for planning committee meetings.
- 14 A draft calendar for the period June to October 2024 was approved at the Council meeting on 24 May 2023. This approach provided Members, officers and members of the public with some degree of certainty for the period from the end of the Municipal Year through to the winter, and appears to have been well received. It is therefore proposed that the same approach will be adopted for the next Municipal Year. Due to clashes of meetings, the following changes are proposed:
 - Audit and Governance Committee on Thu 25 July 2024 is moved to Mon 29 July 2024 and the meeting on Thu 26 September 2024 is moved to Mon 30 September 2024. This is to avoid having two committee meetings on the same day.
 - Corporate Policy Committee moves from Thu 4 July 2024 to Thu 11 July 2024 to avoid a clash with the LGA Annual Conference.
- 15 The dates for the Strategic Planning Board, Northern Planning Committee and Southern Planning Committee have been scheduled to meet on a Wednesday in accordance with scheduling timeframe agreed by Council on 13 December 2023:

- Strategic Planning Board – meet bi-monthly.
- Northern Planning Committee and Southern Planning Committee: to meet around every 6 weeks.

Site visits to take place on the Friday before the meeting in question.

- 16 Meetings of full Council have been scheduled to be held on a Wednesday on the following dates - 15 May 2024, 17 July 2024, 16 October 2024, 11 December 2024 and 26 February 2025, with the start time of 11 am.
- 17 The meetings of service committees have been scheduled to take place on the same day of the week where possible. If there is a specific need for additional or fewer meetings, this can be dealt with under existing arrangements.
- 18 The Audit and Governance Committee and Licensing Committee have been scheduled to meet five times each year. Provisions exist for additional meetings to be called if needed.
- 19 The scheduling of meetings of the Scrutiny Committee has been approached on a quarterly basis, as is currently the case. It is acknowledged however that there may be the need to arrange ad-hoc meetings, when required to deal with bespoke external scrutiny matters e.g., external proposals by health providers, using the general powers of the Committee Chair. The quarterly scheduling will provide for annual reporting, with flexibility around the dates of meetings, to suit business needs.
- 20 A draft calendar of dates for the period May to October 2025 is also included to help with diary planning.
- 21 The Committee is asked to refer the calendar to Council for approval.

Consultation and Engagement

- 22 The calendar has been shared with the Group Leaders, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees and senior officers.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 23 The Council is required to give public notice of its meetings in order to fulfil its legal obligations under the Access to Information Rules set out in the Constitution and to meet its obligations under the Local Government Act 1972. The calendar will assist the Council in meeting these requirements and will provide certainty for Members.

24 Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The authority would be unable to plan the decision making function of the council in an effective manner	Decisions not being made in a timely manner. The business needs of the council not been met

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 25 In accordance the Local Government Act 1972 and the Access to Information Rules in the Constitution, the Council is required to give public notice of its meetings, and a calendar of meetings assists in fulfilling this legal obligation.
- 26 Members of the public have a legal right to attend to participate in and observe council meetings, e.g., make representations in respect of planning applications, asking questions at meetings, and presenting appeals.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 27 There are financial implications in relation to introducing twilight and evening meetings, as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 11.
- 28 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 requires a budget saving of £135,000 in relation to the cost of democracy. This saving target has not been reached.
- 29 Evenings or twilight meetings create additional budgetary burdens. There would be an hourly business support staffing charge of £25.21 per hour for all meetings held after 7pm at Westfields, Municipal Buildings, Crewe and Delamere House, Crewe and after 5pm at Macclesfield Town Hall. Any staff grade 8 and under in attendance at meetings would be entitled to claim overtime and there are also facilities costs associated with keeping the buildings open for longer.

Policy

30

An open and enabling organisation

Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision-making

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

31 There are no direct implications for equality.

Human Resources

32 There are no direct implications for human resources.

Risk Management

33 A published calendar of meetings enables effective business planning and decision-making procedures.

Rural Communities

34 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

35 There are no direct implications for children and young people.

Public Health

36 There are no direct implications for Public Health.

Climate Change

37 There are no implications for climate change.

Access to Information

Contact Officer:	Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Calendar of Meetings for Municipal Year 2024/25
Background Papers:	None