

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 24th January 2013
Report of: Democratic and Registration Services Manager
Subject/Title: Frequency of the Council's Meetings

1.0 Report Summary

1.1 This report seeks the views of the Committee upon whether the frequency of the Council's meetings should be reviewed.

2.0 Decision Requested

2.1 That the principle of fewer Council meetings be supported, and a report be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee in order for the detailed implications to be assessed.

3.0 Wards Affected

4.1 All of the Council's wards are affected.

4.0 Policy Implications

4.1 If the frequency of meetings was to be changed, care would need to be taken in order to ensure that this did not create detrimental delays to the adoption of Council policies.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 These are set out in the main body of the report.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 No adverse implications arise from the proposals contained in this report.

7.0 Risk Management

7.1 The risks of making changes to the Council calendar of meetings will be assessed in a more detailed report, which the recommendations of this report propose should be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

8.0 Information

8.1 The calendar of Council meetings shows that Council members attend around 220 formal meetings of its decision-making and other bodies each year.

- 8.2 At a time when elected members heavily engaged with constituency and other work, and when efficiencies need to be made, the Council should question whether so many meetings are necessary and whether, instead, their frequency might be changed.
- 8.3 A brief snapshot has been taken of the frequency of meetings held by 15 other comparator local authorities. Further work needs to be undertaken to verify the results obtained, but the following issues arise from this initial work:
- The average number of full Council meetings amongst the comparator authorities is x8 pa. Cheshire East holds x8 full Council meetings each year. However, eight authorities hold fewer full Council meetings: four hold x7 meetings pa and four hold x6.
 - The details of Cabinet meetings held by comparator authorities need further research, but initial suggestions would appear to suggest that Cheshire East Council has a higher number of Cabinet meetings each year than most of the other authorities. The Cabinet of one authority appears only to meet once every two months.
 - The average number of “regulatory” committee meetings of the comparators is 72pa. Cheshire East’s regulatory committees meet over 80 times pa.
- 8.4 More detailed analysis of the information from other authorities will illustrate more accurately whether Cheshire East Council holds more meetings than others, but the initial snapshot would appear to suggest that this may be the case.
- 8.5 Whilst we must ensure that Members meet frequently enough to make timely decisions, there should be no assumption that old frequencies of meetings, which have applied since the authority was created, should continue to apply.
- 8.6 There could be a number of benefits arising from a reduction in the frequency of meetings:
- More time being available for Members to spend on constituency or other work
 - More officer time available for other things, and the potential of consequent efficiency savings.
 - A reduced need to hire, service and use fewer meeting rooms eg it currently costs approximately £1400 to hire the public address system each time it is used at Council.
 - Fewer meetings for Members to travel to, with a consequent saving in mileage allowances and travelling time.

- Fewer agenda print-runs, which might lead to reduced printing costs

8.7 In the light of the above and in these austere times, historical assumptions in respect of the frequency of meetings should be challenged. However, care must be taken in order to ensure that fewer meetings would not lead to:

- Too much business being required to be done when the bodies in question do meet.
- A “log-jam” of business, which would prevent important decisions being made in a timely way.

8.8 It is therefore proposed that a report should be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee. In the interim, discussion should take place with report-authors and heads of service in order for the implications of a change in the frequency of meetings to be properly assessed.

8.9 The January 2013 meeting of the Constitution Committee would normally receive a draft timetable of meetings for the 2013/14 municipal year and would make recommendations in respect of its proposed adoption by Council in February. The appended draft calendar of meetings, which has been produced following consultation with Members and officers, is provided with this report for information purposes. The proposals of this report, if agreed, would delay the usual process of adoption of the Calendar of meetings and would result in a calendar of meetings not being agreed until the April meeting of Council.

9.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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