

## **Council**

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**Date of Meeting:** 17 October 2019

**Report Title:** Review of Council and Cabinet Meeting Arrangements

**Senior Officer:** Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance

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### **1. Report Summary**

- 1.1. This report raises a number of matters for the Council's consideration regarding the arrangements for Council and other meetings. These matters were considered by the Constitution Committee at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The Committee's views and recommendations are set out in this report.

### **2. Recommendations**

That Council approve

- 2.1. That with effect from the start of the next municipal year, all ordinary meetings of the Council be held on Wednesdays.
- 2.2. That Council meetings other than the Annual Council meeting continue to be held in Sandbach, at Sandbach Town Hall, but where a larger venue is needed for a particular occasion, a suitable venue in an alternative location be used.
- 2.3. That with effect from the start of the next municipal year, all ordinary Council meetings start at 11.00 am.
- 2.4. That at meetings of Council and the Cabinet, a maximum period of two minutes be allowed for each member wishing to ask a question during members' question time, and a maximum period of two minutes be allowed for each member of the public wishing to speak or ask a question during public speaking time, subject to the Chairman having discretion to vary this requirement where he/she considers it appropriate.
- 2.5. That at meetings of Council, a total period of two minutes be allowed in which the proposer and seconder of a motion under Paragraph 1.34 (a

Notice of Motion) may speak in order to explain the purpose of the motion before the motion is dealt with.

- 2.6. That the Director of Governance and Compliance be authorised to make such amendments to the Constitution as she considers necessary to give effect to the changes recommended above.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. To consider a number of issues raised by members in relation to Council and Cabinet meeting arrangements.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. Any other options considered are outlined in the report.

### **5. Background**

#### **Moving the day of Council meetings**

- 5.1. At the moment, with the exception of the Annual Council meeting in May, all meetings of the Council are held at the Town Hall in Sandbach on Thursdays.
- 5.2. Thursday in Sandbach is Market Day. This attracts a considerable number of people into the town centre whilst also reducing the amount of public car parking available. This presents difficulties for some of the 82 members of Cheshire East Council, some of whom find it difficult to find a parking space within a reasonable walking distance of the Town Hall. It also presents problems for those members who have mobility issues. The Constitution Committee therefore recommends that Council meetings be held on Wednesdays, given that Cabinet meetings are usually held on Tuesdays, and that members prefer to avoid Mondays and Fridays for meetings where possible.

#### **Alternative venues for Council meetings**

- 5.3. The Constitution Committee considered, as a possible alternative solution, whether Council meetings should be held in towns other than Sandbach. In the past, Council meetings have been held at venues in Macclesfield, Crewe and Congleton although this did not prove popular with some members having to travel greater distances. In addition, the meeting rooms available in some locations were less than ideal and the acoustics were quite poor. Sandbach has therefore established itself as the optimal location, given its central geographical position in the Borough. Where a larger venue is needed for a particular occasion, a suitable alternative venue has been used such as Tatton Park for Mayor-making and Crewe Alexandra Football Club for the Local Plan.

- 5.4. The Constitution Committee, having considered the matter, resolved to recommend to Council that Council meetings other than the Annual Council meeting continue to be held in Sandbach but where a larger venue is needed for a particular occasion, a suitable venue in an alternative location be used.

#### **Consistent start time for Council meetings**

- 5.5. Members also expressed the view that the start time for Council meetings should be consistent throughout the year. At the moment, the meetings in July and October are held at 2.00 pm, with the remaining meetings starting at 11.00 am. However, some members have now expressed the view that there should be a consistent start time for Council meetings. It is recommended that this should be 11.00 am as currently applies to the majority of Council meetings.
- 5.6. The Constitution Committee, having considered the matter, resolved to recommend to Council that in future, all ordinary Council meetings should start at 11.00 am.

#### **Public and Member speaking time for Council and Cabinet**

- 5.7. It has been suggested that a specific period of time should be allowed for each speaker during public and member speaking/question times at Council and Cabinet meetings.

#### *Member questions at Council and Cabinet meetings*

- 5.8. Currently, at Council meetings, a period of 30 minutes is allowed for members' questions. There is no specific time allocated to individual members.
- 5.9. At Cabinet meetings, a period of 20 minutes is set aside for questions to be put to Cabinet Members by members of the Council. Again, there is no specific time allocated to individual members. The Leader or person presiding will determine how Cabinet question time will be allocated.

#### *Public Speaking/Questions at Council and Cabinet meetings*

- 5.10. At Council meetings, a period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to speak.
- 5.11. At Cabinet meetings, a period of 10 minutes is allocated for public speaking. Members of the public are normally allowed to speak for up to 5 minutes each, but the Leader or person presiding will decide how the public speaking time will be allocated where there are a number of speakers.
- 5.12. The time taken by a Cabinet member or a committee chairman in responding to a question is not counted as part of the time available.

- 5.13. Concern has been expressed about the amount of time allocated to individual public speakers at Council meetings where there are a large number of people wishing to speak; often resulting in other speakers being restricted in terms of time. This has led to calls for a specific period to be allocated to each speaker as of right.
- 5.14. In considering this matter, the Constitution Committee had regard to the need to balance adequate public and member speaking arrangements with the need to allow sufficient time for consideration of the substantive reports on the agenda and the significant decisions that arise from those reports.
- 5.15. The Constitution Committee, having considered the matter, resolved to recommend to Council that at meetings of Council and the Cabinet, a maximum period of two minutes be allowed for each member wishing to ask a question during members' question time, and a maximum period of two minutes be allowed for each member of the public wishing to speak or ask a question during public speaking time, subject to the Chairman having discretion to vary this requirement where he/she considers it appropriate.

#### **Procedure for Dealing with Notices of Motion at Council meetings**

- 5.16. Paragraph 1.34 and Appendix 2 of the Council Procedure Rules, relating to Notices of Motion at Council meetings, provide that:
- “When a Motion has been moved and seconded the mover and seconder shall not be entitled to make a speech if the Mayor decides that it shall stand referred without discussion to such of those bodies as the Mayor may determine, for determination. However, if the Mayor considers it conducive to the despatch of business, the motion may be dealt with at the meeting at which it is initially considered.”
- 5.17. There is a view among some members that this Rule should be amended to allow the proposer and seconder of the motion at the Council meeting to make a brief statement on the purpose of the motion before Council decides whether to refer it to a decision-making body.
- 5.18. Under the current rules, the proposer and seconder of a motion under Paragraph 1.34 may speak first on the motion when it is considered by the decision-making body to which it has been referred by Council. The matter is then opened up for wider discussion. At that meeting, the members considering the motion will have the benefit of a detailed report on the matter.
- 5.19. The Constitution Committee, having considered the matter, resolved to recommend to Council that at meetings of Council, a total period of two minutes should be allowed in which the proposer and seconder of a motion under Paragraph 1.34 (a Notice of Motion) may speak in order to explain the purpose of the motion.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

6.1.1. There are no particular legal implications arising from this report, which concerns the administrative arrangements for the Council and other meetings within the existing legal framework for such meetings.

6.1.2. There may be consequential amendments to the constitution arising from any changes to the current arrangements for meetings.

### **6.2. Finance Implications**

6.2.1. There are no particular financial implications.

### **6.3. Policy Implications**

6.3.1. There are no particular policy implications.

### **6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. There are no particular equality implications.

### **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1. There are no particular human resources implications.

### **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. There are no particular risk management implications.

### **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. There are no particular implications for rural communities.

### **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. There are no particular implications for children and young people.

### **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. There are no particular implications for public health.

### **6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. There are no particular implications for climate change.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. There are no particular ward implications.

## **8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1. No consultation arrangements are envisaged.

## **9. Access to Information**

9.1. The constitution can be found on the Council's website.

## **10. Contact Information**

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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