

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

27 APRIL 2021

REFERENCE FROM CABINET

A.2 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS: 2021/2022 MUNICIPAL YEAR

(Report prepared by Ian Ford and Keith Simmons)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To enable Council to give consideration to the programme of meetings for the 2021/2022 municipal year.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report will enable Council to, as required by the Constitution, agree a programme of meetings for the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

(a) That the programme of meetings for the Council and Committees, as set out in the Appendix to this report, be approved; and

(b) That the proposed dates for All Member Briefings be noted.

PART 2 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

Further to minute 153 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19 March 2021 a proposed programme of meetings is set out as an Appendix to this report. At that meeting Cabinet decided that :-

(a) the programme of meetings for the Council and Committees, as set out in the Appendix to item A.5 of the Report of the Corporate Finance & Governance Portfolio Holder, be agreed, in principle, and be submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Council for its formal approval; and

(b) the proposed dates for All Member Briefings for Members be noted.

The meetings of the Full Council, the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Human Resources and Council Tax Committee, the Licensing and Registration Committee and the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will normally commence at 7.30 p.m.

Meetings of the Planning Committee and the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee will normally commence at 6.00 p.m. Meetings of the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee and the Licensing & Registration Committee (other than the meeting arranged for July 2021) will be arranged as and when required.

Meetings of the Standards Committee will normally commence at 10.00 a.m.

Meetings of the Audit Committee will normally commence at 10.30 a.m.

Cabinet meetings are fixed by the Leader of the Council in accordance with Article 7.08 Cabinet Procedures Rule sub-section 1.1 of the Council's Constitution and therefore the scheduling et cetera may change. The public meetings of the Cabinet listed will normally commence at 10.30 a.m.

The programme does not show meetings of the Sub-Committees, which are arranged either at meetings of the relevant Sub-Committee or from time to time when required.

Dates for All Member Briefings have been included in order to assist Members in keeping their diaries up-to-date.

Changes to the Programme made since the Cabinet Meeting on 19 March 2021

Council will be aware that the statutory provisions of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 will expire on 7 May 2021. On this basis, local authorities are preparing for the return to holding meetings in a physical location rather than online. However, a court case initiated by Hertfordshire County Council, Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers is seeking a declaration that the reference in the Local Government Act 1972 to Council meetings being in a 'place' should be read as permitting online meetings. The hearing date for this case is 21 April 2021. The outcome of this case is therefore awaited.

Members will also be aware that the Government's Covid-19 roadmap proposes that organised indoor meetings (e.g. performances, conferences) will be permitted from 17 May 2021, subject to Covid secure guidelines and capacity rules. On this basis, the Government has advised councils to consider the extent to which their meetings can operate on the same basis as other local institutions in their area, taking into account their individual circumstances and requirements. The Government has suggested that any council that is concerned about holding physical meetings should consider resuming these after 17 May 2021, at which point it is anticipated that a much greater range of indoor activity will resume in line with the roadmap. In addition, whilst councils have a legal obligation to ensure that the members of the public can access meetings, the Government is encouraging councils to continue to provide remote access to meetings in order to minimise the need for the public to attend meetings physically until at least 21 June 2021, at which point it is anticipated that all restrictions on indoor gatherings will have been lifted in line with the roadmap.

The schedule of meetings identifies two formal meetings in the period to 17 May; Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 May and the Planning Committee on 11 May. No formal proposals are made at this stage to change these arrangements. However, discussions with the relevant Committee Chairmen will proceed following the Annual Council meeting. It is hoped that these discussions can benefit from the outcome of the court case on 21 April referenced earlier.

At this stage, it is further envisaged that informal meetings (such as the All Member Briefings) will continue to be conducted remotely; at least until 21 June.

In addition, the date of the Audit Committee meeting due to have been held on 28 October 2021 has been brought forward to 30 September 2021 in order to ensure that the Council can comply with the Government's recently announced deadline for the publication of the Council's finalised Statement of Accounts.

The Programme of Meetings, as set out in the Appendix to this report, has been amended accordingly.

Venues for Meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees Etc.

Meetings of the full Council, the Cabinet and the Committees etc. will be held either remotely online via Microsoft Teams (with a live stream to the public via Facebook), or in a physical location (such as at Clacton Town Hall in the Princes Theatre for full Council meetings or in the Essex Hall for Cabinet meetings), or by a combination of the two (the so-called 'hybrid' approach). The actual mechanism by which meetings will be held will be dependent on the prevailing circumstances at the time in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic together with the statutory powers that are available to the Council in relation to the holding of meetings.

Council will be aware that, as part of the "Transforming Tending" project, the Council Offices at Weeley will be closed and the site disposed of, with the departments currently based at Weeley being moved to Clacton-on-Sea. This will obviously mean that the current Council Chamber at Weeley would then no longer be available for Committee etc. meetings.

In preparation for this disposal a phased programme of office accommodation works has been underway for some time at the Town Hall, Clacton-on-Sea. Included within these works is the provision of a new Committee Room within the Town Hall in Clacton and it is currently anticipated that the new Committee Room will be operationally available during the Summer (subject to any Covid-19 restrictions (if any)). At that time a transition of Committee etc. meetings from Weeley to Clacton will take place.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

None.

APPENDICES

Programme of Meetings for the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.