

To: Council
Date: 30 November 2020
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Meetings programme for March 2021 to May 2022

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	This report sets out a programme of Council, committee and other meetings for the end of the current 2020/21 council year (1 March to 18 May 2021) and the whole of the 2021/2022 council year (19 May 2021 to 31 May 2022)
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	N/A
Recommendations: That Council resolves to:	
1.	Approve the programme of Council, committee and other meetings from 1 March 2021 to 31 May 2022 attached at Appendix 1;
2.	Delegate authority to the Head of Law and Governance, in consultation with Group Leaders, to make changes to this programme in the event that there is any decision by Council to change the committee structure or committee remits which impacts on the programme of meetings; and
3.	Delegate authority to the Head of Law and Governance to set dates for additional training and briefing sessions for Members.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Programme of Council and committee meetings in calendar format March 2021 to May 2022

Introduction and background

1. This report sets out the proposed schedule of Council and committee meetings for the last part of the current municipal year and the whole of the next municipal year, from 1 March 2021 to 31 May 2022.
2. Council previously agreed a programme of meetings for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 Council years at a meeting on 25 November 2019. However, the postponement of the local elections originally scheduled for 7 May 2020 has necessitated some changes to that programme. The programme as a whole has been reviewed but

changes to meeting dates are limited to March, May and June 2021 and March 2022.

- Appendix 1 provides the programme of meetings of Council, Cabinet, committees, sub-committees, the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group, Scrutiny standing panel meetings and Member training and briefing sessions. Dates shown after the 18 May 2022 Annual Council meeting are provisional and will be subject to a future Council decision on the meetings programme for the 2022/23 council year.
- Setting the programme for all main Council and committee meetings in advance allows for good governance, open and efficient decision making and helps Members and officers to plan their workloads and availability.

Proposed changes to the Programme

The postponement of the local elections to 6 May 2021 requires the rescheduling of some meeting dates. The proposed changes are explained below and where meeting dates have changed these are shown in bold underlined text in Appendix 1.

Meeting dates in March 2021

- The meeting of Council originally scheduled for 29 March 2021 now falls within the pre-election “purdah” period for the 6 May 2021 local elections. It is proposed that this meeting is moved forward by one week to 22 March 2021 to avoid the pre-election period, and starts at the later time of 6.00pm. The date of a Parish Council Forum meeting has been moved to accommodate this change.

Meeting dates in May and June 2021

- Due to the postponement of the 7 May 2020 local elections the meetings previously scheduled for the period between the new election date of 6 May 2021 and the annual meeting of Council on 19 May 2021 have been put back until after the annual meeting. The Cabinet meeting originally scheduled for 12 May 2021 has been removed from the programme and the June 2021 Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee meetings have been put back a week due to their proximity to the elections.

Meeting dates in March 2022

- The last ordinary Council meeting of the 2021/22 municipal year has been moved from 28 March 2022 to 21 March 2022 to avoid the start of the pre-election period. Meetings of the Standards Committee, Shareholder and Joint Venture Group and Companies Scrutiny Panel within the last two weeks of March 2022 have also been rescheduled to accommodate this change.

Changes to committees

- This report assumes that the structure and the remits of committees will be unchanged from 2020/21. Should Council decide to make changes to its committee structure at any point, a revised programme may need to be prepared and circulated. It is recommended that authority is delegated to the Head of Law and Governance, in consultation with Group Leaders, to make changes to the meeting programme as required following any such decision.

The remainder of the Programme

- Aside from the proposed changes explained above other meeting dates are unchanged from those agreed by Council on 25 November 2019. For clarity the rationale for the scheduling of these meetings is restated below.

10. Council has previously asked officers to as far as possible avoid scheduling meetings during school holidays, during certain religious festivals and on Fridays. The main Christian festivals coincide with public holidays. There are no significant clashes with major Sikh or Buddhist festivals. Major festivals for those of Muslim, Jewish and Hindu faiths taken into account are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Dates of major Muslim, Jewish and Hindu festivals

Festival	Dates in 2021	Dates in 2022
Eid-al-Fitr	Wed 12 - Thur 13 May	Mon 2 - Tues 3 May
Ramadan	Mon 12 April - Tue 11 May	Sat 2 April – Sun 2 May
Eid-al-Adha	Mon 19 - Tues 20 July	Sat 9 - Sun 10 July
Rosh Hashanah	Mon 6 - Wed 8 Sept	Sun 25 - Tues 27 Sept
Yom Kippur	Wed 15 - Thur 16 Sept	Tue 4 - Wed 5 Oct
Diwali	Thurs 4 Nov	Mon 24 Oct

11. The principle used in timetabling is that Council business must happen in a timely manner but the broader needs of Members should be taken into account. As far as practicable meetings have been scheduled to avoid school holidays and major religious festivals, where this does not adversely affect the overall programme. In some cases this has been unavoidable. Members of most committees are able to appoint a substitute from the same political group if they cannot attend themselves.
12. The programme is very busy so there is limited scope for meetings to be moved or added without creating diary clashes for Members and officers. The Constitution contains provisions for cancelling meetings where there is no business and scheduling further meetings if required.

Meetings of Council in 2021

13. Following all-out elections in May 2021, the annual meeting of Council must be held between the 8th and 21st day after the retirement of councillors¹. Following the elections on 6 May 2021, the date of retirement and assumption of office is Monday 10 May, so Council must hold an annual meeting between 18 and 31 May 2021.
14. The date of 19 May 2021 allows sufficient time for political groups to meet, decide if they wish to propose any immediate changes to the committee structure and nominate Members to seats on committees in time for the Annual Council meeting.
15. Holding the annual meeting of Council on an early date allows the election of the Lord Mayor and the Leader, the appointment of committees and the start of the decision making cycle. A later meeting date would create a longer gap in the decision-making cycle which would have implications for dealing with the Council's business in a timely manner.
16. The 26 July 2021 Council meeting is scheduled for the first day of the school holidays to avoid Eid-al-Adha which falls in the previous week.

¹ Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12 S1 (2) (a).

Meetings of Council in 2022

17. The Council's budget meeting is scheduled for 16 February 2022, which falls during the week of half-term (15-19 February). This has been difficult to avoid. Council must set the Council Tax at a meeting once the other precepting authorities have set their budgets and in time for some 60,000 Council Tax bills to be produced before the start of the new financial year.
18. The County Council budget meeting is expected to be held on 15 February 2022. The Police and Crime Commissioner will set the policing budget following a meeting of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel (TVPCP), normally in late January. Parish Councils will be asked to submit their precepts in good time.
19. A second Council budget meeting has been reserved for 28 February 2022 in case Council or another precepting authority is unable to agree a budget meaning Council is unable to set the Council Tax at its meeting on 16 February 2022. In 2020 the reserve date was needed to set the Council Tax because the TVPCP met the day after the Council's budget meeting.
20. The annual meeting of Council is scheduled for 18 May 2022, the earliest possible day following the 5 May 2022 local elections.

Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee

21. The regular cycle of Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet meetings is intended to provide for efficient executive decision making while allowing sufficient time for effective pre-decision scrutiny. Scrutiny Committee is generally scheduled to meet on a Tuesday and Cabinet on the following Wednesday.
22. The Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee meetings scheduled for August 2021 are reserved only for any decisions which must be taken then, and pre-scrutiny of those decisions. If there are no such decisions these meetings may be cancelled.
23. Dates for meetings of scrutiny standing panels (currently the Finance & Performance Panel, Housing & Homelessness Panel and Companies Scrutiny Panel) have been included in the programme.
24. The Scrutiny Committee may also establish review groups which will set their own meeting dates.

Planning Committees

25. The two area planning committees have scheduled monthly meetings. Council will be asked to confirm the allocation of new wards to each area committee when agreeing the committee structure at the annual meeting on 19 May 2021.
26. The Planning Review Committee is also scheduled to meet monthly to allow for the call in of decisions taken by area planning committees. Recent experience is that Planning Review Committee meetings typically take place c.3 times per year. The same date may be used as an adjournment date if the business for either area planning committee cannot be completed at a scheduled meeting. If not required for this or their original purpose, Planning Review Committee dates may be used for other Member meetings or briefings, or cancelled altogether.

Licensing Committees and sub-committees

27. The General Purposes Licensing Committee and the Licensing & Gambling Acts Committee are scheduled to meet three times in the year with meetings of the two

committees held back to back (Council will be recommended to appoint the same Members to both licensing committees at its annual meeting).

28. Meetings of the General Purposes Licensing Casework Sub-Committee have been scheduled regularly throughout the year. Meetings currently start at 5.30pm.
29. The Licensing & Gambling Acts Casework Sub-Committee has to meet within set timescales and provisional dates for this sub-committee have been scheduled regularly through the year. This sub-committee currently starts between 5.00pm and 6.00pm as agreed with the sub-committee.
30. The Head of Law and Governance can cancel or convene sub-committee meetings after consulting with the chairs as required by the caseload (as set out in section 14.6 of the Constitution).

Audit and Governance Committee

31. The Audit and Governance Committee is scheduled to meet four times in the year to receive quarterly audit and risk reports and undertake its other responsibilities.

Standards Committee

32. The Standards Committee is scheduled to meet four times in the year to receive regular reports from the Monitoring Officer on the numbers of Code of Conduct cases, updates on developments in ethical governance, requests for individual dispensations and proposals for Member training. Where there is little to report meetings may be cancelled by the Head of Law and Governance after consulting the Chair of the Standards Committee.

Appointments Committee

33. Two meetings of the Appointments Committee are scheduled in the year for the Chief Executive to report on the Council's senior management arrangements, as required by the Council's Constitution (Part 9.3(a)(iii)).
34. The Appointments Committee is also responsible for recommending to Council any appointment to the position of Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) and the designation of Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer, and for appointing to the positions of executive director and assistant chief executive or posts of similar seniority. Additional meetings can be scheduled by the Chief Executive or the Head of Law and Governance after consulting the Chair of the Appointments Committee, should the need arise.

Investigations and Disciplinary Committee

35. This committee would only meet to decide on disciplinary hearings involving a Statutory Officer, Executive Director or Assistant Chief Executive. The Committee and Member Services Manager has delegated authority within the Council's Constitution to convene meetings of this committee should the need arise.

Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) meetings

36. Shareholder and Joint Venture Group meetings are scheduled to provide for quarterly reporting on the progress, performance and financial position of the Council's companies and joint ventures. Prior to these quarterly meetings a meeting of the Companies Scrutiny Panel is scheduled to facilitate pre-decision scrutiny of matters coming to the SJVG.

Training and briefings

37. Training and briefing sessions are offered to assist with Members' learning and development. Dates for training and for briefing sessions are included to allow Members to plan ahead. Members are advised to note these dates in their diaries.
38. These sessions will typically run from 5.30pm to 7.00pm or 6.00pm to 7.30pm to accommodate members who work office hours. A programme of training sessions and briefings on topical issues will be circulated to Members separately by the Committee and Member Services Team.
39. It is recommended that the Head of Law and Governance is authorised to arrange additional training and briefing sessions to cover additional training and briefing sessions as requested by officers or Members.

Meeting start times

40. The default start time for all meetings is 6.00pm with the exception of Council meetings which start at 5.00pm. Committees are able to vary this start time and some committees have previously agreed to do so. The two licensing committees may set the start times for their sub-committees or these sub-committees may set their own start times on a case-by-case basis.
41. Any committees wishing to vary the start time to later than 6.00pm must first consult the Committee and Member Services Manager to ensure that these meetings can be suitably resourced and supported by officers.

Meeting locations

42. Regulations² enabling local authorities to hold meetings remotely are currently due to expire on 7 May 2021. It is not yet clear whether provisions for remote meetings will be extended or replaced beyond this date. Oxford Town Hall is the venue for all meetings held in a physical location and Zoom remains the default platform for meetings held remotely.

Publicising meeting dates

43. Meeting dates will be available online via the Council's website and intranet once agreed by Council. The on-line calendar is the most effective way to view accurate and up to date meeting dates. In addition the meeting details can be downloaded into individual members' calendars. Where meetings are cancelled or rescheduled during the year, the meeting details in Members' calendars will not update automatically and Members will need to update their calendars manually. The Committee and Member Services Team will circulate instructions to Members on the downloading of calendars.

Legal issues

44. Meetings which the Council is required by legislation to hold have been included in the programme. There are no other legal issues arising from the recommendations in this report.
45. The Head of Law and Governance can cancel scheduled meetings where there is no business, or arrange additional or re-scheduled meetings after consulting with the relevant committee chair (set out in section 14.6 of the Constitution).

² The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

Financial Issues

46. The Council and committee programme can be delivered within existing resources. There are no financial issues arising from this report.

Report author	Jennifer Thompson
Job title	Committee and Members Services Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252275
e-mail	jthompson@oxford.gov.uk
Background Papers: None	

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