

To: Council
Date: 27 November 2023
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Meetings Programme for May 2024 to May 2026

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	This report sets out a programme of Council, committee and other meetings for the whole of the 2024/25 and 2025/26 Council years.
Recommendations: That Council resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the programme of Council, committee and other meetings from 1 May 2024 to 31 May 2026 attached at Appendix A; 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 May 2024 to May 2026

Introduction and background

1. This report sets out the proposed schedule of Council and committee meetings for whole of the next two municipal years, from 1 May 2024 to 31 May 2026, for approval by Council.
2. Council agreed a programme of meetings on 30 January 2023 which included meetings in May 2024. There have been no changes to the meetings programmed for May 2024.
3. Appendix A provides the recommended programme of meetings of Council, committees, sub-committees, Scrutiny standing panel meetings and Member training and briefing sessions. Meeting dates for Cabinet and the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group are a matter for the Leader of the Council and are included in the programme for completeness.

- 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.

Programme of Meetings

- This report assumes that the Council's decision making arrangements and committee structure will be unchanged from current arrangements. 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 programme as required following any such decision.
- The principle used in timetabling is that Council business must happen in a timely manner but the broader needs of Members will be taken into account. 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 2024/25	Dates in 2025/26
Eid-al-Fitr	Sunday, 30 March – Monday, 31 March 2025	Thursday, 19 March – Friday 20 March 2026
Ramadan	Friday, 28 February – Sunday, 30 March 2025	Tuesday, 17 February – Wednesday, 18 Mar 2026
Eid-al-Adha	Sunday, 16 June – Thursday, 20 June 2024	Friday, 6 June – Monday, 9 June 2025
Rosh Hashanah	Wednesday, 2 October – Friday, 4 October 2024	Monday, 22 September – Wednesday, 24 September 2025
Yom Kippur	Friday, 11 October – Saturday, 12 October 2024	Wednesday, 1 October – Thursday, 2 October 2025
Diwali	Friday, 1 November 2024	Tuesday, 21 October 2025

- 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 if they cannot attend themselves.
- 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 Council's Constitution (Part 14.6) contains provisions for cancelling committee meetings where there is no business and scheduling further committee meetings if required. Part 11.5 of the Council's Constitution contains provisions for scheduling special meetings of Council.

Meetings of Council

9. In a year of ordinary elections of councillors to the Council, the annual meeting of Council must be held between the 8th and 21st day after the retirement of councillors¹. In any other year, the annual meeting of Council may be on any such day in the month of March, April, or May as the Council may fix². There is an Oxford City Council election scheduled for May 2024, so Council will hold the Annual Meeting in mid May 2024.
10. Following the elections on 02 May 2024, the date of retirement and assumption of office is Monday 06 May 2024, so in May 2024 Council must hold the annual meeting between 14 and 27 May 2024. The proposed date of 16 May 2024 is early in this window but 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.
11. 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.
12. The Council's budget meeting is scheduled for 13 February 2025, which falls during the week of half-term (12-16 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.
13. A second Council budget meeting has been reserved for 24 February 2025 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 13 February 2025.
14. The same principles have been applied to the scheduling of Council meetings in 2025/26.

Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee

15. The regular cycle of Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet meetings is intended to provide for efficient Executive decision making and to allow sufficient time for effective pre-decision scrutiny. Scrutiny Committee is generally scheduled to meet on a Tuesday and Cabinet on the following Wednesday.
16. The Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee meetings scheduled for August 2024 and August 2025 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.
17. Dates for meetings of the Scrutiny Committee's Climate & Environment Panel, Finance & Performance Panel and Housing & Homelessness Panel have been included in the programme, should they be reconstituted in the 2024/25 municipal year.

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

² Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12 S1 (2) (b).

18. Should the Scrutiny Committee establish other standing panels and/or review groups for the 2024/25 municipal year, those panels and/or review groups will set their own meeting dates.

Planning Committees

19. The Oxford City Planning Committee will generally meet on the third Tuesday of each month.
20. The Planning Review Committee is also scheduled to meet monthly to allow for the call-in of decisions taken by the Oxford City Planning Committee. Recent experience is that Planning Review Committee meetings typically take place c. 3 times per year, however to date in the 2023/24 municipal year the Planning Review Committee has not yet met. In some cases, the Planning Review Committee date may be used as an adjournment date if the business of the Oxford City Planning Committee cannot be completed at a scheduled meeting. If the date is not required for this or its original purpose, Planning Review Committee dates may be used for other Member meetings, or cancelled altogether.

Licensing Committees and Sub-Committees

21. The General Purposes Licensing Committee and the Licensing & Gambling Acts Committee are scheduled to meet three times per 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 meetings).
22. Meetings of the General Purposes Licensing Casework Sub-Committee have been scheduled regularly throughout the year. Two additional meetings have been scheduled per municipal year to account for the increase in workload and to reduce lengthy gaps between meetings so that business can be dealt with in a timely manner.
23. 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.

Audit and Governance Committee

24. The Audit and Governance Committee is scheduled to meet quarterly to receive audit and risk reports and undertake its other responsibilities. A fifth meeting is scheduled (in September) for the Committee to consider and approve the annual statement of accounts.

Standards Committee

25. The Standards Committee is scheduled to meet three times per year to receive reports from the Monitoring Officer on the number of Code of Conduct complaints received, 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

26. Two meetings of the Appointments Committee are scheduled per year for the Chief Executive to report on any changes to the Council's senior management arrangements, as required by the Council's Constitution (Part 9.3(a)(iii)).

27. 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 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

28. 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 (7.6(d)) to convene meetings of this committee should the need arise.

Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) Meetings

29. The Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) is responsible for acting as owner of the Council's companies and for safeguarding and furthering the Council's interests and investments in its companies and joint ventures. The SJVG is scheduled to meet six times per year in total, with two meetings being held every four months, one for Oxford Direct Services and one for the Council's other companies and joint ventures.

30. Members of the Companies Scrutiny Panel will continue to be invited to attend and scrutinise items considered at SJVG meetings, as a means of providing more effective and efficient Scrutiny oversight of the shareholder function.

Training and Briefings

31. Training and briefing sessions are offered to assist with Members' learning and development. Dates for training and briefing sessions are included to allow Members to plan ahead. Members are advised to note these dates in their diaries.

32. Compulsory training will always be offered on a choice of dates and times. Non-compulsory training and Member briefing sessions will typically start at 6.00pm. A later start time would have an impact on the employment arrangements of officers.

33. Members have previously been asked to provide feedback on the topics, timings and delivery of member briefings. The responses suggest that there is a clear preference for briefings to be held in the evening (the alternative being at lunchtime) and delivered remotely over Microsoft Teams, with the sessions being recorded for the benefit of Members who are unable to attend where possible.

34. A programme of training sessions and briefings on topical issues will be circulated to Members separately by the Committee and Member Services Team.

35. It is recommended that the Head of Law and Governance is authorised to arrange additional training and briefing as requested by officers or Members.

Meeting Start Times

36. The default start time for all meetings is 6.00pm with the exception of Council meetings which start at 5.00pm. Committees and sub-committees are able to vary this start time and some sub-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.

37. 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

38. Most Member meetings are subject to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 which requires Members to be physically present together in a set location. The exceptions to this are meetings of standing panels and review groups established by the Scrutiny Committee and Member training and briefing sessions, which may be held remotely. Oxford Town Hall is the venue for all meetings held in a physical location and Zoom is the default platform for meetings held remotely. Following the installation of a hybrid meetings solution in the Town Hall, some meeting attendees may join meetings remotely (e.g. Cabinet Members when summoned by the Scrutiny Committee), however Committee and Sub-Committee Members are not permitted to attend remotely and must be physically present at the Town Hall.

Publicising Meeting Dates

39. Meeting dates will be available online via the Council’s website and intranet once agreed by Council. The online 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

40. 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.

41. The Head of Law and Governance can cancel or reschedule meetings where there is insufficient business in consultation with the chair, group leaders and Chief Executive if the agenda has not already been published, or arrange additional special meetings after consulting with the relevant committee chair (as set out in Part 14.6 of the Council’s Constitution).

Financial Issues

42. The programme of meetings can be delivered within existing resources. There are no financial issues arising from this report.

Report author	Jonathan Malton
Job title	Committee and Members Services Manager
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 529117
e-mail	jmalton@oxford.gov.uk
Background Papers: None	

This page is intentionally left blank