

Report of the Chief Executive

Report to General Purposes Committee

Date: 9th May 2012

Subject: Review of Council Meetings

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

Group Leaders and Whips have discussed the scope for modernising the operation of the Full Council Meeting, in particular to allow for greater opportunities for Council to engage in activities linked to Community Leadership and holding the Executive to account. This report contains proposals arising from those discussions in particular that;

- Deputations to be retained in the present format but be reduced by one to four
- That there be two free standing State of the City Meetings per municipal year
- The order of Council business be altered to allow for the receipt of recommendations from the Executive Board and committees immediately after the item receiving reports from Statutory Officers
- The period of Question Time be retained without amendment
- The receipt of minutes be retained with minutes from joint committees/authorities and the Leeds Initiative also presented to full Council.
- A new item 'Members' Community Concerns' be introduced;
- Restrict the number of White Paper Motions to two (with each being time limited) with the first being reserved to the opposition
- The viability of live streaming of the proceedings of Council be explored with a further report to Executive Board

Recommendations

General Purposes Committee is asked to;

- a) consider the proposals contained in this report and recommend to Full Council adoption of the new arrangements, with the necessary consequential changes to Council Procedure Rules being delegated to the City Solicitor in consultation with Group Whips.
- b) That the revised arrangements be reviewed by General Purposes Committee during the course of the Municipal Year.
- c) Recommend that Full Council agrees to there being two State of the City meetings per Municipal Year.
- d) Note the options available to the Council to Live Stream Council meetings and request that a further report be prepared for consideration by not later than July 2012.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 Group Leaders and Whips have discussed the scope for modernising the operation of the Full Council Meeting, in particular to allow for greater opportunities for Council to engage in activities linked to Community Leadership and holding the Executive to account.
- 1.2 This report contains proposals arising from those discussions and General Purposes Committee is asked to recommend to Full Council adoption of the new arrangements outlined, with the necessary consequential changes to Council Procedure Rules being delegated to the City Solicitor in consultation with Group Whips.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Members have acknowledged the long standing case for the review of the operation of the Full Council meeting. In November 2011 Council convened, under suspended procedures to focus upon the 'The State of the City'. This format was well received by Members and Executive Board considered lessons learned and proposals for future meetings early this calendar year.
- 2.2 Group Leaders and Whips have also considered the opportunities for further amendments to the operation of Ordinary Council Meetings; primarily based upon the widely held view that;
 - There is dissatisfaction with the current ordinary meetings and the lack of back bench member engagement,
 - There is a need to maximise the opportunity for Members to contribute in Full Council – with lengthy responses from Members being curtailed
 - Sufficient certainty is built into the processes of Council to allow for Groups to ensure issues they wish to be considered can be

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Over recent weeks the Chief Executive and City Solicitor have facilitated cross party discussions with Group Whips, Leaders and other senior Councillors, to assess the options for revamping the operation of Ordinary Council meetings. This report sets out proposals based upon those discussions.
- 3.2 In broad terms the proposals are to;
 - (a) Retain deputations in the present format as a direct link between the Council and the electorate, but they be reduced by one to four.
 - (b) Provide for two free standing State of the City Meetings per municipal year
 - (c) Vary the order of Council business to allow for the receipt of recommendations from the Executive Board and committees immediately after the item receiving reports from Statutory Officers
 - (d) Retain Question time in the present format
 - (e) Continue to receive committee minutes and that Council also receives minutes from joint committees/authorities and the Leeds Initiative Strategic Partnerships
 - (f) Introduce a new item 'Members' Community Concerns';

- (g) Time limit White Paper Motions and reserve submission of the first to the opposition.
- (h) Explore the viability of live streaming of the proceedings of Council be explored with a further report to Executive Board

3.3 The changes proposed are explored further below.

Deputations

3.4 It is recognised that Deputations provide a vital direct link between full Council and the people of Leeds. Later in the report, a new item, Members' Community Concerns, is proposed for introduction to Council Day, which will further reinforce those links. As a consequence it is proposed that the number of deputations be reduced by one, i.e. from five to four.

State of the City Meetings

3.5 Following the success of the inaugural State of the City meeting, particularly the benefits arising from engagement with partners, it is proposed that there be two State of the City meetings per Municipal Year.

3.6 For the Year 2012/13 a State of the City meeting has been scheduled (subject to the approval of dates at the Annual Council meeting) for 28th November 2012.

3.7 Further dialogue will be needed to determine how the second State of the City meeting for the 2012/13 will be accommodated during the Municipal Year.

Receipt of Minutes

3.8 An important way in which full Council maintains a link with the Committees it appoints, and with the Executive Board, is through the receipt of Minutes. It is proposed that this be continued under the new arrangements and that, in addition to existing minutes Council also receives the minutes from joint authorities/joint committees and from Leeds Initiative Partnerships.

Members' Community Concerns

3.9 It is proposed that, a new item, 'Members' Community Concerns' be introduced; where issues can be raised by back bench members¹.

3.10 It is proposed that a period of up to one hour be set aside for this item with up to two topics being reserved to the largest political group, and a further 4 being distributed to opposition groups (i.e. one per opposition group).

3.11 To facilitate this, initial thinking is that the member proposing the issue would be eligible to speak for five minutes, with the relevant Executive or other Member having up to five minutes to respond.

¹ It is proposed that the definition of Back bench member, in these circumstances, be defined as any Member who is not, an Executive Member or Scrutiny Board Chair

- 3.12 Thereafter each matter raised will then be considered to have been dealt with (i.e. without further comment from other Members). However Council would retain scope to refer matters considered under this item to the Executive, a Scrutiny Board, a relevant Area Committee, or elsewhere as may be appropriate, for further consideration.

White Paper Motions

- 3.13 It is proposed that the number of White Papers considered at Council, be restricted to two² and that a time limit be set for each individual White Paper. It is further proposed that submission of the first of these be reserved to opposition groups and that a time limit be introduced of ½ an hour to deal with each White Paper.

Live Streaming of Full Council Meetings

- 3.14 Officers were asked to provide brief information on the potential to livestream or webcast Council meetings as part of the discussions to change and modernise the arrangements for Council. The following information has been obtained through brief discussions with a number of councils and representatives of a major supplier. A more detailed study would be required if Members were minded to consider progressing any proposals.
- 3.15 More than 40 English local authorities now regularly broadcast their council meetings and or other meetings as part of their strategy to involve and engage people in local democracy. These include: Barnsley, Birmingham, Bristol, Derby, Hull, Kirklees, Leicester, Newcastle, and a number of the large county councils.
- 3.16 Features of such systems are normally that access is made available over the internet to full council and other meetings and a library of previous meetings can also be accessed³. Providers are also able, alongside the video screen options, to provide access to the agenda, papers and presentation documents, along with index points and times. Some sites encourage and facilitate discussion via social media such as Twitter.
- 3.17 Comments from Democratic Services Officers in Kirklees, who first broadcast Council in May 2010, are that the service has been well received by the public and the local press. They report that engagement in meetings is increasing from the usual small number of people in the public gallery to more than 10 times that number and audiences of more than 1000 where an item of significant interest is to be discussed. A recent evaluation report suggested an average of more than 1000 viewings per month of Council meetings.
- 3.18 Indicative pricing for a fixed installation ranges from £14000 - £17000 per annum depending on a number of factors (e.g. number of hours, camera follow and hardware provided etc.) Normally these include:
- Leased hardware (including maintenance and upgrades)

² It is recognised that there may be eventualities where Council collectively may wish to place on record Council's collective view on a matter, for example to a government minister. In such circumstances a suspension of procedure rules would enable such an emergency white paper motion to be considered

³ See hosted web sites for Kirklees(<http://www.kirklees.public-i.tv/core>) and Bristol <http://www.bristol.public-i.tv/core>

- Software licence
- Full project and account management
- Helpdesk support
- Full hosting of all content.

3.19 Some Council's, including Kirklees, have linked webcasting to the refurbishment of the Council Chamber and the purchase of audio and voting equipment. More recent technology enables audio systems to link directly to webcast systems so that cameras automatically track the speaker. The audio system in Leeds, due to its age is unlikely to be able to link in such a way and an alternative manual method would be necessary (e.g. staff entering speaker numbers).

3.20 Clearly more detailed discussions including ICT, Communication and Planning⁴ officers are required; however a further report will be provided to Executive Board by no later than July 2012.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 Members from across all political groups have been consulted on potential changes to the format of full Council meeting. Minority opposition groups have sought reassurance that opportunities will be preserved and enhanced for opposition business to be considered by Council. These proposals seek to address these concerns in that;

- Access to question time and comments on minutes are unchanged
- Each opposition group is allocated one 'back bench concern' per Ordinary Council meeting
- The first white paper motion is reserved for an opposition group

4.1.2 However the Green Group have stated that they would prefer Council to receive up to three time limited white papers and thereby allow the Green Group a more even chance of having a White Paper motion considered by Council during the Municipal Year.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 An initial consideration of the equality, diversity, cohesion and integration screening form indicates that there are no issues raised by the review of the operation of Full Council .

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 The Council's Business Plan 2011 – 2015 sets out the Council's priorities in delivering services to the public over that period. Particularly the priorities and performance measures for Corporate Directorate require that we "Ensure there are good rules and procedures to govern the council's business".

⁴ in respect to the listed building status of the Council Chamber

4.4 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.4.1 These proposed amendments need to be made by Full Council.

4.5 Risk Management

4.5.1 There are no corporate risks arising from this report.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The proposals contained within this report seek to further embed democratic accountability within the Council's governance arrangements. Appendix 1 summarises the outline timings of the Council day.

6 Recommendations

6.1 General Purposes Committee is asked to;

- a) consider the proposals contained in this report and recommend to Full Council adoption of the new arrangements, with the necessary consequential changes to Council Procedure Rules being delegated to the City Solicitor in consultation with Group Whips.
- b) That the revised arrangements be reviewed by General Purposes Committee during the course of the Municipal Year .
- c) Recommend that Full Council agrees to there being two State of the City meetings per Municipal Year.
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7 Background documents⁵

None

⁵ The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.