

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-051-2014/15
Date of meeting: 1 December 2014



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Technology & Support Services
Subject: Calendar of Council Meetings 2015/16
Responsible Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).
Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That, as attached at Appendix 1, the draft Calendar of Council Meetings for 2015/16 be recommended to the Council for adoption.

Executive Summary:

The Cabinet considers the calendar of meetings each year prior to its final approval by the Council. The calendar has developed over time to meet the changing needs of the authority and, where possible, meetings of a Committee have been standardised on a particular night of the week. Within the current Democratic Services Business Plan, there is an item to review the Calendar of Council Meetings, and in particular the frequency of meetings. The only change proposed for the Calendar this year is the rescheduling of Executive meetings from Monday evenings to Thursday evenings.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Item for action within the Democratic Services Business Plan for 2014/15.

Other Options for Action:

Individual frequencies of meetings could be varied. In practice additional meetings are added as and when issues dictate. Similarly, meetings can be cancelled if there is a lack of business.

Report:

1. Within the current Democratic Services Business Plan, there is an item in the Action Plan to review the Calendar of Council Meetings, and in particular the frequency of individual Committees. As a result, Democratic Services submit the draft Calendar of Council meetings each year to the Cabinet for consideration prior to its approval by the Council.

2. The draft Calendar at Appendix 1 is based upon the current year's calendar, with approximately the same number of meetings. It has been slightly amended in some places but wherever possible:

- (a) all Miscellaneous Committee meetings have been scheduled for a Monday evening;

(b) all Overview and Scrutiny Panels have been scheduled for a Tuesday evening;

(c) all Planning Sub-Committee meetings have been scheduled for a Wednesday evening; and

(d) all Cabinet and Cabinet Committees have been scheduled for a Thursday evening.

3. Friday evenings have continued to be kept free of meetings, and any encroachment into August has been kept to a bare minimum due to holidays. However, the Regulatory Committees have always continued to meet throughout August in the past and this practice has been continued.

The Executive

4. Regular Council meetings have remained on their traditional Tuesday night. With the elections returning to their traditional date of the first Thursday in May, the Annual Council is scheduled for Thursday 28 May. This is two days later than normal but this amendment will give extra time to complete the appointment process and prepare the papers for the meeting.

5. With two of the Cabinet Committees now meeting on a Thursday evening as this is more convenient for Officers and Members, the main change this year has been to schedule all meetings of the Cabinet or Cabinet Committees on a Thursday evening. As a consequence, the meetings of the Miscellaneous Committees that previously met on a Thursday evening have been rescheduled for Monday evenings.

6. The Cabinet continues to meet 9 times throughout the municipal year. An extra meeting was added for 2014/15 to assist the Cabinet in meeting its work programme, and this arrangement has been retained for 2015/16. It was noted last year that most Councils hold monthly Executive meetings.

7. In line with previous years, the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee has not been included on the Calendar as the advice from Officers is that it meets as and when evaluations for the different sites are received. Therefore, no purpose would be served in scheduling regular quarterly meetings.

Overview & Scrutiny

8. The requirement for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to meet a few days before each Cabinet meeting was removed last year and this has also been retained for 2015/16. In addition, an opportunity has been taken to revamp the organisation of Overview & Scrutiny for 2015/16. Following the initial meeting in June 2015, to confirm the membership and Chairmen of each Scrutiny Panel, there will be five Scrutiny cycles – each spread over two months and culminating in a meeting of the full Overview & Scrutiny Committee. One meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has been scheduled for Tuesday 5 January 2016, as this is felt to be a better date than Tuesday 22 December 2015; but this will still be a week before the first Scrutiny Panel meeting of the new cycle.

9. The Council is currently undergoing a review of its Overview & Scrutiny function, including the composition of the standing Scrutiny Panels and this review is not due to report until March 2015. Consequently, 25 dates have been set aside for the new Scrutiny Panels to meet in 2015/16, and these can be allocated to the new Standing Panels before the start of the new municipal year.

Planning

10. The Calendar for 2011/12 changed the frequency of the Area Planning Sub-Committees from a three weekly cycle to a four weekly cycle. It is felt that this change has worked well, with minimal impact upon the relevant Key Performance Indicators, and this arrangement has again been retained for 2015/16. The week of the Annual Council meeting has been kept free of Planning meetings and this will enable training to take place for any new Members elected.

11. No Area Planning Sub-Committee has been scheduled for Wednesday 23 September 2015, as this would clash with the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur. This has necessitated a five week gap between Sub-Committees from September to October, but the usual four week gap has been reinstated for the meeting cycles for the remainder of the municipal year (with the exception of Christmas week). One of the scheduled dates for a Scrutiny Panel in September is on a Monday to avoid the Jewish Festival of Rosh Hashanah the previous week.

Licensing

12. Licensing Sub-Committee meetings have remained on a Tuesday morning, and no evening meetings for the Licensing function have been scheduled following the decision by Overview & Scrutiny to abolish them a year ago. Oftentimes, additional meetings of the Sub-Committee are arranged to hear cases concerning Premises (Alcohol) Licences, but these are scheduled as and when required. All members of Licensing continue to meet twice a year to consider policy and procedural matters.

Miscellaneous Committees

13. Both the Youth Council and the Local Highways Panel have not been included in this schedule as it is felt that they are meetings that sit outside the Council. The Youth Council have their own programme, and the Local Highways Panel involves the County and Local Councils.

14. As mentioned earlier in the report, the only change in this section is that those Committees which meet in the evening have had their meetings rescheduled from a Thursday evening to a Monday evening to accommodate the corresponding change for Cabinet and Cabinet Committee meetings.

15. Two meetings of the Appointments Panel have been scheduled for the two Thursdays following the Local Elections on 14 and 21 May 2015, prior to the Annual Council on 28 May. Two corresponding meetings have been scheduled for May 2016.

Conclusion

16. The Cabinet is requested to consider the draft Calendar of Council meetings for 2015/16, as attached at Appendix 1, and whether any further changes are required. However, it should be noted that the current Calendar is very congested and the organisation of any additional meetings should be given very careful consideration. Any changes requested by the Cabinet will be incorporated into the final version to be considered by the Council on 16 December 2014.

Resource Implications:

No identifiable savings as there are no significant changes planned for next year's Calendar.

Legal and Governance Implications:

None foreseen, as the proposed Calendar allows the Council to fulfil its obligations under the various different Local Government Acts.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Any substantial increase in the number of Member meetings would hinder the Council in meeting its obligations under the Nottingham Declaration.

Consultation Undertaken:

No external consultation undertaken.

Background Papers:

None.

Risk Management:

That an insufficient number of meetings would be scheduled for a particular Committee to complete its business for the year; however, if this became apparent then additional meetings could be arranged as necessary.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

Wherever possible, meetings have not been scheduled to coincide with major religious festivals.