

13 September 2016

Report of	Assistant Chief Executive	Author	Jonathan Baker
Title	Review of Meetings and Ways of Working		☎ 282207
Wards affected	Not applicable		

This report requests the Committee review the work undertaken to date and agree a way forward for the review of meetings and ways of working.

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To consider and note the contents of this report.
- 1.2 To consider the ideas suggested in **Appendix 1**, and provide feedback on the focus of the review.
- 1.3 To consider the proposal for an informal meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee with internal and external stakeholders to discuss the review and ways of working.
- 1.4 To agree a timescale for the review to take place and when the next report will come to the meeting.

2. Reasons for Decision(s)

- 2.1 At the previous meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee, Members agreed a scope and a set of objectives for the review of the current ways of working. This report sets out the current situation as well as some of the ongoing projects that will be running in parallel to this review.
- 2.2 Following the Committee agreeing to the scope officers have provided a brief summary, **Appendix 1**, of the issues that the Committee may wish to consider and any immediately identifiable advantages or disadvantages to these issues.
- 2.3 The Committee will need to identify those issues that it wishes to focus on, and whether there are any additional items that need to be included as part of the review.
- 2.4 To ensure that the review is effective, it has been suggested that the Committee hold an informal meeting to discuss decision making processes and identify ideas that could be further researched. As part of this meeting the Committee may wish to invite members of the public, Colchester Borough Councils and Councillors from other authorities.
- 2.5 The Committee will also need to determine the timescales to which they want additional reports to come back to the Governance and Audit Committee within the work programme.

3. Current situation

- 3.1 All public Committee meetings provide members of the public with the ability to have their say at the beginning of each meeting on either a general matter relating to the committee or on an issue relating to an item on the agenda. Each speaker is permitted three minutes to speak, with a bell indicating when they have one minute remaining and a final bell to signal the end of the three allotted minutes. **Table 1**, below highlights the number of public have your say speakers for each meeting.

Table 1

Committee Meeting	Number of Meetings during 2015/16	Number of Public 'Have Your Say' speakers
Cabinet	7	12
Council	6	18
Governance Committee	5	0
Local Plan	6	11
Planning Committee	21	87
Revolving Investment Fund Committee	4	2
Scrutiny Panel	9	7
Trading Board	6	1
Total	64	138

- 3.2 The current age profile of Councillors on the authority is listed below in **Table 2**, with information on the gender profile just below. The Local Government Association Census in 2013 reported that the average age of Councillors was 60.2 years, with 12% of Councillors aged under 45, and 22.2% of Councillors aged over 70. Whilst the average age of Councillors on Colchester Borough Council is similar to the national average, there are a higher proportion of Councillors aged under 45 and a lower average of Councillors over 70. With regard to the gender profile of the Council, the proportion of male Councillors is similar to the national average, as reported in the 2013 Census, of 67.3%.

Table 2

	<21	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	>70
Totals	0	6	4	6	11	18	6
Percentage	0	12%	8%	12%	21%	35%	12%

Councillor Gender Profile;

- Male 33 (65%)
- Female 18 (35%)

- 3.3 The Council uploads recordings of all Committee meetings on its website in the days following the meeting. Unfortunately information on the number of users accessing these files is unavailable. Some neighbouring Councils in Essex provide both video and audio streaming of meetings.
- 3.4 The provision, delivery and evaluation of member development is overseen by the Member Development Group. This is an all-party group, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Resources, which reports to Cabinet on an annual basis. The priorities for Member Development are set out in the Council's Member Training Plan. Going

forward, it is anticipated that the Group will be looking at assessing the training needs of the new Council and reviewing the Training Plan.

Training and development sessions are scheduled on an approximately monthly basis. In 2015-16, forty nine councillors attended one or more development event, either internal or external, with almost a third of Councillors number attending five or more sessions. Some training is mandatory: for example members sitting on planning and licensing committees must have attended relevant training. Following the whole Council elections in May 2016, a New Council Conference was held on 12 May 2016. This was a new approach and was aimed at providing Councillors with the information they needed about the Council and its services and the support available to them at an early stage and in one event, reducing the overall time required to address these issues for both Councillors and officers. Initial feedback has been positive.

The Council was awarded Charter Status for Elected Member Development, an external assessment of its member development policies and processes, in April 2011 and has maintained its accreditation since. The Council passed its most recent interim reassessment in June 2016 and a full reassessment will be due in January 2018.

- 3.5 With regard to Social Media, a link to the published agenda is tweeted from Colchester Borough Council's twitter profile. In addition, members of the public are able to sign up to newsletters through the Colchester Borough Council website containing links to published Committee agendas and any significant changes to the Committee calendar.

4. Ongoing Projects

The Council is currently implementing the Digital Challenge business Case, which aims to improve the way the Council works by harnessing the latest technology.

- 4.1 As part of this project Officers and Councillors are having their IT software upgraded to Microsoft Office365, a cloud based platform allowing for the access of e-mails, files and the office package on any device in any location. Councillors will also have the ability to set up shared drives between Committees, Political Groups, and Councillors as a whole. Councillors may wish to identify means by which they believe the processes around meetings could be improved.
- 4.2 In addition to the move to Office365, Councillors are also part of a pilot to help save money by reducing the Council's printing bill. This involves accessing Committee agendas through tablet and laptop applications. Using MyCMIS, agendas are automatically delivered and downloaded to devices; the applications also allow for annotations to be made and saved for access during meetings. The Democratic Services team held an event on 11 July 2016 to highlight the ways in which Councillors could access their agendas digitally; 25 Councillors attended the meeting. There are further plans to continue the roll out of the application and support to Councillors, a user guide for the applications has also been produced.
- 4.3 A project to improve the Town Hall wireless network is underway. This is expected to be in place by October providing a quicker and more stable connection to the internet across the building. This follows the improvement of the wireless network at Rowan House Offices during August.

5 Proposals

- 5.1 That the Governance and Audit Committee agree the ideas that it wishes to include in the review of meetings and ways of working.
- 5.2 That the Governance and Audit Committee hold an informal meeting at a time that Committee members deem most convenient to members of the public and other stakeholders to ensure their participation. Members will also need to consider whether they wish to hold the meeting in public or in private to enable the most effective means of feeding external views into the review. Councillors will also be required to ensure that members of the public are aware of an informal meeting and encourage participation.
- 5.3 Given that the review is occurring as part of the work programme for the Governance and Audit Committee, the review of meetings and ways of working will need to be completed by the end of the municipal year. The Governance and Audit Committee has three meetings remaining, with an additional meeting needing to be scheduled in for February/March 2017. This due to the inclusion of the Revenue and Capital Quarterly Monitoring reports being moved from the Scrutiny Panel following the last Council meeting. Given that this would be the final Governance and Audit Committee of the municipal year a final report on the review of meetings and ways of working could be scheduled for this meeting.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The manner in which the Council governs its business is an underpinning mechanism in the Council's Strategic Plan aims to set out the direction and future potential for our Borough.

7. Publicity Considerations

- 7.1 If the Committee decide to hold an informal meeting to gather the views of members of the public and external stakeholders, this will have to be publicised with advanced notice to ensure effective participation.

6 Financial, Equality, Diversity and Human Rights, Consultation, Community Safety, Health, Safety and Risk Management Implications

- 8.1 None identified

Background Papers

Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013