

REVIEW OF BUSINESS PROGRAMME - REDUCTION IN NUMBER OF CYCLES

Report of the Strategic Head of Service & Monitoring Officer (Legal and Democratic Governance)

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee has requested a report that reviews the implementation of a reduction in the business programme from 9 cycles to 6 cycles per municipal year which was agreed by the Council Meeting on 16 January 2020.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. During the 2018/19 Municipal Year, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee agreed to undertake a short scrutiny review to assess how the scrutiny function was carried out in Stockport.
- 2.2. This review reported its findings to the Cabinet on 23 April 2019 making a series of eight recommendations that aimed to address four key themes identified by the Panel during the course of the review; specifically, the culture of scrutiny, the annual scrutiny work programme, training and the business programme.

- 2.3. With regard to the business programme, the Panel made the following recommendation:-

“That the Strategic Head of Service (Legal, Democratic Governance & Estates and Asset Management) be requested to reduce the number of Scrutiny Cycles to six from the 2020/2021 municipal year when presenting the Business Programme to the Council Meeting for approval”.

- 2.4. In considering the Final Report of the Panel, the Cabinet agreed that its recommendations should be considered as part of a wider governance review being led by the Constitution Working Party that had been convened to respond to proposals contained within the 2018/19 Medium Term Financial Plan (Proposal 6 – Support and Governance) and that had proposed a wider reduction in the wider business programme beyond just scrutiny committees.

- 2.5. This recommendation then advanced through the Governance process and a report including a proposed business programme for 2020/21 and 2021/22 taking into account the parameters set by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee and the MTFP were taken to the following committees for recommendation, comment and ultimately a decision:-

2.5.1. Constitution Working Party – 9 September 2019

2.5.2. Cabinet – 6 January 2020

2.5.3. Council Meeting – 16 January 2020

- 2.6. It should be taken into account when reviewing this report that a business programme for 2020/2021 based on nine cycles of committees had already been

agreed by the Council Meeting and published prior to the amendments being approved. That meant that a full re-design and re-distribution of the business programme throughout 2020/21 could not take place and that only certain cycles could be lifted out. This has resulted in an uneven distribution of meetings throughout the year.

- 2.7. The Business Programme for 2021/22 has been completely re-casted and redistributed throughout the year in line with the recommendations made following cross party consultation (to include, where possible, avoiding school holidays and religious holidays/holy days). A copy of the published Business Programme for 2021/22 is at Appendix 1.

3. OBSERVATIONS ON 2020/2021 BUSINESS PROGRAMME

- 3.1. The following extraordinary meetings were required during 2020/21:-

- 3.1.1. Two extraordinary Council Meetings were required on 17 November 2020 (subsequently adjourned to 3 December 2020) to deal with the GMSF and 4 March 2021 to deal with Clean Air Plan Governance. These were required to be called at these times, outside of the business programme, in order to meet the decision making requirements of GMCA;

- 3.1.2. Two extraordinary Cabinet meetings were required on 28 September 2020 to deal with Clean Air Plan decision making and 4 December 2020 to deal with the GMSF;

- 3.1.3. There have been four extraordinary Scrutiny Committees:-

- 3.1.3.1. Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 5 November 2020 (GMSF);
- 3.1.3.2. Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2020 (GMSF)
- 3.1.3.3. Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 16 March 2021 (HMIC Report); and
- 3.1.3.4. Children and Families Scrutiny Committee on 17 March 2021 (Joint Director of Education).

- 3.2. The removal of the March 2021 cycle meant that there were an unusually high number of reports that were taken to the December/January 2021 cycle as that was the last Council Meeting (excluding Budget Council meeting) of the municipal year, in particular in relation to CRM&G, Economy & Regeneration, Cabinet and Council meetings.

- 3.3. There were also challenges for quarterly performance management reports which were sometimes being reported up to a quarter behind because of the timing of cycles; however that ought not to be an issue going forward due to the ability to space out the timing of the cycles more easily for 2021/2022.

- 3.4. It has also been noted that there is an April cycle of meetings (excluding Council Meeting) which fall within the pre-election period. However, when the amended business programme was agreed for 2020/21 there was, at that point, no Election

scheduled to take place in May 2021 and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the scheduling of elections could not have been foreseen at the time.

3.5 As is to be expected from shortening the number of cycles in the business programme (from nine to six, namely by a third), meetings and agendas would consequently become longer. Members are asked to consider whether the increase in length of meetings and number of items on agendas is now over burdensome.

3.6 The table below illustrates the difference between duration, number of items and number of pages each agenda comprised between the 2019/20 Municipal Year which was based on nine cycles of committees, and for the part-year period from May 2020 to February 2021 (inclusive) of the current Municipal Year where a six meeting cycle has been operated.

Meeting	Duration of Meeting (hours)			Items on Agenda			No. of pages of Agenda		
	2019/20	2020/21	Change	2019/20	2020/21	Change	2019/20	2020/21	Change
Adults & Health Scrutiny	1.31	1.95	+49%	4.5	7.25	+61%	136	184	+35%
Children & Families Scrutiny	1.23	1.58	+28%	4.57	6.40	+40%	94	119	+27%
Communities & Housing Scrutiny	1.58	1.86	+18%	5.38	7.80	+45%	212	304	+43%
CRMG Scrutiny	1.45	2.40	+66%	7.75	9.6	+24%	180	243	+35%
Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny	1.19	1.38	+16%	5	6.3	+26%	188	306	+63%
<i>Adjusted</i>	1.19	1.53	+29%	5	8.5	70%	188	288	53%
Cabinet	1.04	1.18	+13%	8.4	14	+67%	346	708	+105%
<i>Adjusted</i>	1.01	1.70	+68%	8.75	20	+129%	365	867	+138%
Council	3	4.29	+43%	9	9	-	289	515	+78%
<i>Adjusted</i>	3	4.25	+42%	9	10	+11%	289	387	+34%

3.7 Where extraordinary meetings have been held, adjusted figures have also been provided to remove the impact that these (generally) shorter meetings might otherwise have on the data.

3.8 It should be noted that the impact of holding meetings remotely may also be a factor in any observable patterns.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON 2021/22 BUSINESS PROGRAMME

4.1. As per Appendix 1 the Business Programme for its “core” committee meetings (Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council) have been published on a six meeting cycle basis as follows:

- 4.1.1. Annual Council – 25 May 2021;
 - 4.1.2. Cycle 1 – June/July 2021;
 - 4.1.3. Cycle 2 – September/October 2021 (13 week gap between Cycle 1 & 2);
 - 4.1.4. Cycle 3 – October/November 2021 (5 week gap between Cycle 2 & 3);
 - 4.1.5. Cycle 4 – November/December 2021 (**Council Meeting on 13 Jan 2022**) (6 week gap between Cycle 3 & 4);
 - 4.1.6. Cycle 5 - January/February 2022 – Budget cycle (8 week gap between Cycle 4 & 5); and
 - 4.1.7. Cycle 6 – March/April 2022 – (6 week gap between Cycle 5 & 6).
- 4.2. There will be a Cabinet and Council Meeting in March 2022 which will reduce the amount of reports going to the December/January cycle which will assist Members.
- 4.3. In terms of the pre-election period for 2022 the following meetings will fall within that period:-
- 4.3.1. Council Meeting – 31 March 2022;
 - 4.3.2. Area Committees – (4 April to 7 April 2022);
 - 4.3.3. Licensing, Environment & Safety Committee – 20 April 2022; and
 - 4.3.4. Planning & Highways Regulation Committee – 21 April 2022.
- 4.4. In relation to the Business Programme for 2021/22 at Appendix 1, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee on 20 May 2021 needs to be moved until after the Annual Council Meeting (which has been moved from 18 May 2021 to 25 May 2021 due to the election). Furthermore, the Audit Committee have requested an additional meeting on 8 September 2021.
- 4.5. One additional but related point is that at the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee on 8 February 2021 it was resolved that any reports that may have, in that past, gone to more than one Scrutiny Committee would be reviewed prior to agendas being published for the Scrutiny Committees and a lead Scrutiny Committee identified for the report to go to, in consultation with the relevant Scrutiny Committee Chairs.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1. Members to consider the report and the Scrutiny Co-ordination committee to make recommendations as it considers appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Vicki Bates on telephone number Tel: 0161 474 3219 or alternatively email vicki.bates@stockport.gov.uk