

Report of the Director of Governance

Public Scrutiny Arrangements and Decision Making

Summary

1. This report sets the proposed arrangements for Scrutiny Committees between November 2020 and May 2021 following a period of reduced public meetings during the coronavirus pandemic and highlights ongoing arrangements for public decision making.

Background

2. Following the coronavirus outbreak, public decision making arrangements were reintroduced from May 2020 and have been operating with full Executive, quasi-judicial (Planning, Licensing) meetings and Executive Member Decision Sessions since May 2020. The next calendar cycle of meetings from November 2020 to May 2021 will include a full schedule of those decision making meetings, together with fully re-instated Executive Member Decision Sessions. However, the full suite of Scrutiny Committees had ceased to meet in public due to restrictions in meeting regulations and available support for those meetings, since March 2020.
3. Since July 2020, the Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee has been meeting remotely in public.
4. Government Statutory Scrutiny Guidance (2019) promotes the four core principles for effective scrutiny originally proposed by The Centre for Public Scrutiny and it is essential that Scrutiny returns to public meetings to ensure that the below principles are supported:
 - a. Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
 - b. Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;

- c. Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role;
- d. Drive improvement in public services.

Consultation

- 5. The Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee have been closely consulted on the timetabling arrangements for public scrutiny moving forward to May 2021.

Options

- 6. Members can accept the timetable as set out in Annex A and arrangements set out in paragraphs 7-11 or suggest alternatives to the proposal.

Proposed Arrangements for November 2020 to May 2021

- 7. As the statutory scrutiny committee, CSMC will continue as a monthly, public meeting (1730 only).
- 8. Each Committee within the existing structure will meet in public on a staggered, quarterly basis. These quarterly meetings will principally be focused on the 'overview' function, eg receiving performance & monitor type reports and identifying areas for further work.
- 9. Informal meetings will continue but will be re-designated as Forums rather than Committees and will take place quarterly between public Committee meetings.
- 10. There will be two additional slots every month for potential public Scrutiny meetings. One will be dedicated for a 'commissioned' policy development / pre-decision scrutiny and the second will be used for CSMC Call-ins or a second 'commissioned' meeting. Call-in will continue to function in the usual way. The additional public Scrutiny meetings will be commissioned through CSMC following discussion with Executive Members, Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Scrutiny Chairs.
- 11. Scrutiny Chairs' Forum will meet bi-monthly to discuss work-plans.

Analysis

- 12. It is envisaged that the Quarterly Public meetings will be where Members can perform the 'overview' and 'challenge' elements of Scrutiny but also

where areas for further work and monitoring are identified. It is hoped that the Forums will be a place in which the CMT and Executive Members can speak more freely about their plans longer term and identify potential areas for policy development and pre-decision Scrutiny. Forums will discuss and manage their Quarterly Committee's work plans and make recommendations for policy development and pre-decision input to CSMC.

13. Scrutiny Chairs, in liaison with CMT and Executive will identify the most appropriate timescales to recommend pre-decision and policy development meetings on particular topics and CSMC will then 'commission' a Scrutiny Committee to undertake a discreet piece of work which will either come back to CSMC or make a recommendation to a meeting of the Executive or Executive Member Decision Session.
14. Executive Members, CMT and appropriate Officers will attend Forums and Committee meetings as required.
15. Reports will be published in advance of meetings wherever possible. Where this is not possible (eg due to short notice) this will be with the agreement of the Chair / Vice Chair.
16. Reports and Information will be provided to Members in advance of Forum meetings wherever possible but this cannot be guaranteed.

Council Plan

17. Scrutiny Committees can potentially discuss all priorities within the Council's Plan covering the period 2019-23, as it seeks to provide critical challenge and drive improvement in the Council's services and policies.

Implications

18. There are no direct implications associated with this report or its recommendations across any of the following areas:
 - **Financial**
 - **Human Resources (HR)**
 - **Equalities**
 - **Legal**
 - **Crime and Disorder**

- **Information Technology (ICT and digital services)**
- **Property**

Any associated implications will be addressed in any subsequent undertaken by Scrutiny Committees.

Risk Management

19. There is a potential reputational risk to the council in not delivering public meetings of scrutiny and it fails to adhere to the core principles as set out by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. This proposal re-introduces public meetings to mitigate this risk.

Recommendations

Members are asked to consider this information provided and endorse the re-introduction of Scrutiny, as outlined, to our schedule of public meetings.

Reason: To ensure a timely and effective re-introduction of public Scrutiny.

Contact Details

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Specialist Implications Officer(s) None

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes:

Annex A - Proposed Scrutiny Meeting Schedule (Nov 20 to May 21)

Abbreviations

All abbreviations used throughout the report should be listed here in full e.g.

CSMC - Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee.

CMT – Corporate Management Team