

Report to:	COUNCIL
Relevant Officer:	Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council
Date of Meeting:	11 May 2020

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2020/2021

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 The Council will be asked to consider for approval a programme of meetings for 2020/2021 and to note provisional meeting dates from May to December 2021.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To approve the calendar of meetings for 2020/2021 as attached at Appendix 6(a).

2.2 To agree that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the start times of meetings prior to 1 September 2020 which would previously have started at 6pm, be delegated to the Chair to determine. Following that date then these meetings commence at 6pm as usual (set out at the end of the calendar of meetings at Appendix 6(a)).

2.3 To agree that if a plan or strategy, which is normally approved by Council, is due to be expire before the next Council meeting is held, then the Chief Executive be authorised to extend the end date following consultation with the four Group Leaders.

2.4 To approve the extension of the dispensation of the six-month consecutive period for Councillor Mrs Henderson with regard to her non-attendance at a Council related meeting, up to and including the Annual Council meeting in 2021. This dispensation also to apply to all other Councillors up to the Annual Meeting 2021, on the basis that there has since the pandemic started and will be in the immediate future fewer formal Council related meetings to attend as a result of the pandemic, or an effects of it and members may inadvertently breach the non-attendance rule.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To have in place scheduled meeting dates to enable the Council's committees to transact their business during the municipal year. With regard to the non-attendance at meetings in a six-month period, a decision is required at this Council meeting, as retrospective approval cannot be given when the six-month period has expired.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

To not schedule meeting dates, although this will not allow Council and its committees to plan their business and meeting dates for the municipal year ahead. To not grant a dispensation from the 6 month rule for members. However, due to the restricted opportunities to attend meetings and other implications of the pandemic, there is a possibility that members could not fulfil this obligation and their non-attendance would create a causal vacancy, which would not be permitted to be filled until May 2021.

4.0 Council priority:

4.1 The programming of formal Council, committee and Executive meetings will help the Council achieve all its priorities.

5.0 Background information

5.1 Normally, the Annual Council meeting determines the programme of ordinary meetings of the Council. However, the Annual Council meeting is not taking place this year but new regulations allow for meetings of the Council, its committees, sub committees and the Executive to continue. This item sets down a proposed schedule, taking into account the immediate months ahead and the continuing influence of the pandemic.

5.2 A proposed programme of meetings is set out at Appendix 6(a) with the start times for all committees up to September 2020 be for the Chair to determine. Following that date they be as listed at the end of the Appendix.

5.3 Given the unusual circumstances with the current COVID-19 pandemic, Members are as asked to note the following:

- that meetings before the recess period have been limited to those where statutory requirements exist or where it may be necessary to hold a meeting for business continuity.
- it is proposed scrutiny work is undertaken by the Scrutiny Leadership Board before the recess period and reviewed at that point, commencing with an informal meeting to consider this proposal further (see paras 5.6 and 5.7 below).

- that due to the differing positions of the councils wholly owned companies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, that an informal Shareholder's Advisory Board be held initially to consider how their future programme of work may look and when to hold subsequent meetings.
- a meeting of the Council has been proposed for 20 July although the four Group Leaders and the Mayor to be consulted on whether to proceed nearer that date.

- 5.4 There may be plans or strategies which are usually approved by Council which have an expiration date in the coming months. However, due to the pandemic then the normal review and consultation on these documents may not have taken place. If one is due to be expire before the next Council meeting is held then it is proposed that the Chief Executive be authorised to extend the end date following consultation with the four Group Leaders. The document would only be updated in terms of any factual or time related changes.
- 5.5 It is for the Leader of the Council to schedule Executive meetings, but proposed dates have been listed in the programme for completeness.
- 5.6 Meeting dates for the joint Economic Prosperity Board, with Wyre and Fylde Borough Council, have also been added to the programme.
- 5.7 The Centre for Public Scrutiny has issued guidance on the role of scrutiny during the pandemic. It has reiterated the need for scrutiny to continue during this time albeit in a reduced and more direct way. Scrutiny remains a statutory function and an important element of the governance structure at the Council. The guidance suggests that the existing Committees and workplans be temporarily consolidated into one Committee which has a substantive focus on oversight of the system response to Covid-19, use of the social care powers set out in the Coronavirus Act, the work to protect vulnerable children and the work of Public Health. It is suggested that at Blackpool these issues be expanded to include Children's Services Improvement to ensure continued scrutiny of progress following the Ofsted Inspection even at this time. It would also be right for scrutiny to have a role in oversight of the recovery plan at the appropriate time.
- 5.8 It is proposed that the most suitable body at this time to undertake the duties described at 5.7 above, is the Scrutiny Leadership Board, which is formed of the Scrutiny Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Callow, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all three Scrutiny Committees and the Chair of the Audit Committee. The Board also has the option to meet informally as well as formally. It is proposed that the Scrutiny Leadership Board will meet informally on 21 May 2020 to determine the items it would like to consider, the regularity and timings of meetings and how it will manage the scrutiny function going forward.

5.9 The law states that where a Council member fails throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance at a Council related meeting then subject to certain provisions, he/ she ceases to be a member, unless the failure was due to some reason approved before the expiry of that period. Due to the reduced number of meetings which have already been in place and the likely reduced number going forward then a dispensation is recommended to be considered at this Council meeting, as retrospective approval cannot be given when the six-month period has expired.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

List of Appendices:

Appendix 6(a) - Calendar of Meetings 2020/2021

6.0 Legal considerations:

6.1 The Council's Constitution provides for the Annual meeting to formulate a schedule of Council and Committee meetings for the forthcoming municipal year. However, as the Annual Meeting is due to be cancelled then it falls to this meeting to agree a schedule taking account of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.0 Human Resources considerations:

7.1 There are no human resources considerations.

8.0 Equalities considerations:

8.1 There are no equalities considerations.

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 There are no additional financial considerations.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 Failure to put in place a schedule of meetings will put at risk the ability for the Council to transact its business efficiently.

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 There are no ethical considerations.

12.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

12.1 The four Group Leaders have been consulted on the proposed schedule of meetings.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 There are no additional background papers to this report.