

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Council  
**Date:** 30 September 2020  
**Report for:** Decision  
**Report of:** Executive Member for Public Safety, Governance and Reform

### Report Title

**Council and Committee Meetings – Arrangements, Format and Timetable**

### Summary

**The Council is requested to consider the Constitution Working Group's recommendations regarding the continued arrangements for Council and Committee meetings, introduced in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic.**

### Recommendation(s)

That Council agrees to adopt the Constitution Working Group's recommendations, as set out below for Council and Committee meetings for the period October – end December 2020:

1. That the Draft Calendar of Meetings for the period October 2020 to May 2021, as set out in the Appendix 1, be approved.
2. That the Council's meetings should continue to be held virtually and at the earlier time start time of 4.00 p.m. and be concluded by 6.00 p.m. at the latest, with the exception of the full Council meetings in September, October and November, which will be at the usual time of 7.00 p.m. and meetings of the Planning and Development Committee which will continue to be held at 4.30 p.m. and continue until 6.30 p.m.
3. That the arrangements agreed by Council on 15 May 2020 in relation to the Trafford Pandemic Scrutiny Committee and the suspension of the other Scrutiny Committees be extended until the end of 2020.
4. That Council re-affirms the extension of the 6 month attendance rule for Members unable to attend meetings whilst alternative arrangements are in place as agreed by Council on 15 May 2020.
5. That the Constitution Working Group reviews the position again in December 2020 and that a more in depth review of the impact of these arrangements on the efficacy of meetings and on members, including possible alternative options, be conducted and submitted to inform the review in December.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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## 1.0 Background

1.1 The Constitution Working Group reconvened on 9 September 2020 to review the virtual meeting arrangements that had been introduced to enable the Council to continue operating during the national lockdown for the global pandemic. The arrangements had been agreed at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 15 May 2020 and a meeting calendar which included alternative arrangements for Scrutiny was approved until the end of September 2020.

## 2.0 Revised Meeting Arrangements

2.1 Since the Extraordinary Council meeting on 15 May 2020, the Council's meetings have been held virtually. All meetings have started at 4.00 p.m. and, with the exception of the Planning and Development Committee, which finishes at 6.30 p.m. they have been restricted to a 6.00 p.m. finish time.

2.2 A Calendar of meetings, incorporating the revised scrutiny arrangements was agreed until the end of October 2020. A new and revised Draft Calendar of Meetings (Appendix 1) is now presented for agreement to facilitate the decision making process for the period October 2020 to May 2021.

2.3 The Trafford Pandemic Scrutiny Committee was established to oversee the Council's scrutiny function during the national emergency and it was considered necessary to suspend the three appointed scrutiny committees for the foreseeable future. The Chair of Scrutiny and the Pandemic Committee is happy to continue with the single committee arrangement until Christmas. A review will then be undertaken at the end of the year as to whether the Committee continues for the remainder of the municipal cycle or whether the suspended Scrutiny Committees reconvene in early 2021. In addition, it is proposed that an in depth review of Trafford Council Overview and Scrutiny arrangements will be undertaken between now and March 2021.

## 3.0 Potential Impact of virtual Meetings October to December 2020

3.1 The following table shows the frequency of meetings for October - December 2020 and the number of Members and Officers affected.

<b>Committees</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>	<b>No. of Meetings Oct-Dec</b>	<b>No. of key Officers inc. Governance Officers</b>
Accounts and Audit Committee	9	2	5
Council	61	2	5
Executive	10	3	9

Employment Committee	9	1	7
Health and Wellbeing Board	5	1	9
Joint Consultative Panel	9	1	10
Licensing Sub-Committee	3	1	5
One Trafford	3	1	4
Planning and Development Management	13	3	9
Standards Committee	11	1	2
Public Protection Sub-Committee	9	3	8
STAR Joint Committee	1	1	9
Trafford Pandemic Scrutiny Committee	17	1	8
Total:		21	

#### 4.0 Impact of later meeting start times

- 4.1 The Constitution Working Group recognised that although there has been some pressure for a return to 6.30 p.m. start times for Committees particularly given the difficulties which some members face in being able to make themselves available for meetings at the earlier start time, it is clear that the Council and its employees remain at the forefront of the local response to the pandemic.
- 4.2 At the time when the arrangements for virtual meetings were put in place it was generally considered likely that there would have been a significant easing of restrictions by this point in time, which is why it was agreed that the arrangements would be subject to review this month. The expectation was that we would by now have been able to bring at least 40% of the workforce back into the Town Hall and that infection rates would still be continuing to decline. The current reality is somewhat removed from that position with the restrictions locally remaining in place and some areas in Greater Manchester coming under even greater control. Given that the working arrangements for Trafford Council staff are not much changed from when these arrangements were initially put in place, there would be an impact for staff and some of the difficulties associated with an immediate return to 6.30 p.m. meetings are detailed below.
- 4.3 Furthermore a return to face to face meetings at the Town Hall would also have its difficulties in the current climate. The council's Health and safety team have advised against this at present as strict COVID Secure arrangements at the Town Hall are in place, which include a general reduced occupancy levels and restrictions on the occupancy of meeting rooms.

4.4 A return to 6.30 p.m. meetings and continuing on a virtual basis may lead to:

- More interruptions from household members.
- A significant adverse impact on staff welfare and intrusion into home life and the knock-on effect on families. Many employees do not have a designated office within their home and are working from their kitchens and living rooms. Meetings later in the evening will impact on family members restricting their movements and activities during their social time.
- Wi-Fi/Bandwidth issues in both Members and employees' homes with family members accessing other services.
- Lead to an increase in TOIL/Flexi balances for staff supporting the meetings leading to increased absences during the working day/week.

4.5 The Constitution Working Group also noted that most members should be able to claim some time off work to enable them to carry out public duties, although this would not of course apply to members who are self-employed. It was agreed that members would be reminded of this right.

## **5.0 Recommendation**

5.1 That Council agrees to adopt the Constitution Working Group's recommendations, as set out below for Council and Committee meetings for the period October – end December 2020:

- That the Draft Calendar of Meetings for the period October 2020 to May 2021, as set out in the Appendix 1, be approved.
- That the Council's meetings should continue to be held virtually and at the earlier time start time of 4.00 p.m. and be concluded by 6.00 p.m. at the latest, with the exception of the full Council meetings in September, October and November, which will be at the usual time of 7.00 p.m. and meetings of the Planning and Development Committee which will continue to be held at 4.30 p.m. and continue until 6.30 p.m.
- That the arrangements agreed by Council on 15 May 2020 in relation to the Trafford Pandemic Scrutiny Committee and the suspension of the other Scrutiny Committees be extended until the end of 2020.
- That Council re-affirms the extension of the 6 month attendance rule for Members unable to attend meetings whilst alternative arrangements are in place as agreed by Council on 15 May 2020.
- That the Constitution Working Group reviews the position again in December 2020 and that a more in depth review of the impact of these arrangements on the efficacy of meetings and on members, including possible alternative options, be conducted and submitted to inform the review in December.