



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	COUNCIL – 29 NOVEMBER 2023
Subject	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL DRAFT PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2024 – 2025.
Wards Affected	NONE
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council. Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive. Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Max Thompson – Senior Democratic Services Officer. Email: max.thompson@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To approve a programme of Council and Committee meetings for the municipal year 2024-25.
Annexes	Annex A – Programme of Meetings for June 2024 to May 2025.
Recommendation(s)	That Council Resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Approve the Programme of Meetings for June 2024 to May 2025, as detailed in Annex A;2. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance, in consultation with Group Leaders, to make changes to the programme of meetings in the event that there is any future decision of Council to change the committee structure or committee remits that impacts the programme of meetings;3. Delegate authority to the Democratic Services Business Manager to set meeting dates for the Performance and Appointments Committee, member training, member briefing sessions, and any further working groups established by the Council.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO

Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Democratic Services Business Manager;• Senior Democratic Services Officer, Cotswold District Council;• Future Oxfordshire Partnership;• Oxfordshire County Council.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Council is responsible for setting the dates and times of Council and Committee meetings.
- 1.2** This report recommends a schedule of Council and Committee meetings from June 2024 until May 2025 inclusive. Dates for meetings of the Executive are a matter for the Leader of the Council, and are included in the programme for completeness.
- 1.3** Setting meeting dates in advance, allows for good governance, open, efficient and effective decision making, helping members and officers to plan their workloads & availability.

2. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS FOR JUNE 2024 TO MAY 2025

- 2.1** The draft programme of meetings for 2024-2025 has generally been formulated on a similar basis to recent years, and is based on the current committee structure. Council is recommended to approve the programme of meetings as set out in Annex A. Should Council decide to make changes to its committee structure in future, a revised programme may need to be prepared and circulated. It is recommended that authority is delegated to the Director of Governance, in consultation with Group Leaders, to make changes to the programme as required following any such decision.
- 2.2** The principle used in timetabling meetings is that business needs to take place in a timely manner, but that the broader needs of members will be taken into account. Oxfordshire school holiday dates have been avoided wherever possible, so that it does not adversely affect the overall meetings programme or the cycle of meetings.
- 2.3** Meetings of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee are scheduled to be held on the Thursday prior to (most) meetings of the Executive. This is to embed the role of Overview and Scrutiny in the Council's executive decision-making process, allowing time for recommendations to be produced and responded to by the Executive. Executive reports are subject to a robust internal clearance process and the timing of the process is such that Executive reports may not always be cleared for publication when the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda is published and on occasions may need to follow a couple of days later.
- 2.4** District Councillors may also serve as County Councillors and/or Parish Councillors. Meetings of Oxfordshire County Council have been set up to May 2024, with most meetings of that authority starting in the morning (9.00am, 10.00am or 10.30am). At the time of writing this report, the Oxfordshire County Council meeting dates for the concurrent municipal year were not available. Clashes with County Council meetings have historically been few but where they do occur, any members affected would be able to arrange a substitute for one meeting or the other.
- 2.5** Given that many of the officers who deliver the work of the Council and attend meetings are currently employed by Publica Group, and work across at least two other local authorities, care has been taken to avoid Council and Committee meetings at West Oxfordshire District Council clashing with major meetings of Forest of Dean District Council and Cotswold District Council. The avoidance of clashes means that some Committees (e.g., Audit and Governance Committee) do not always meet on the same day of the week. The programme

of meetings across the three councils is very busy meaning there is limited scope to move or add meetings without creating potential clashes for officers. There is a possibility that the Budget Council meeting may be held on the same date as Cotswold District Council meeting; 21 February 2024. However, the two meetings are likely to start four hours apart and this should not cause difficulties for many officers.

3. ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 3.1** Local Elections for one third of seats on West Oxfordshire District Council, along with the election of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner, will take place on 2 May 2024, and the Annual Meeting of Council following those elections is set for 22 May 2024. This date allows sufficient time between the elections and the Annual Council meeting for the formation of groups and the nomination of members to committee seats.
- 3.2** In May 2025 there are County Council elections but no seats on West Oxfordshire District Council are due for election. The Annual Meeting of Council in 2025 is recommended to be held on 21 May 2025.
- 3.3** Council is responsible for appointing committees, in accordance with the requirements of political balance. The responsibility for appointing sub-committees rests with the “parent” committee. The intention is to hold meetings of the parent committees immediately after the Annual Council meetings on 22 May 2024 and 21 May 2025, so that those committees may elect chairs and vice-chairs and appoint sub-committees at the beginning of the municipal year:
- Audit and Governance Committee (for the Standards Sub-Committee);
 - Development Control Committee (for the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee and Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee); and
 - Licensing Committee (for the Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committee).

4. COMMITTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES THAT MEET AS REQUIRED

- 4.1** The following committees and sub-committees will generally only meet during the municipal year where there is specific business to consider, and this report seeks a delegation to the Democratic Services Business Manager to set meeting dates for these committees and sub-committees as required:
- Performance and Appointments Committee – Responsible for matters relating to the appointment, performance, and dismissal of the Council’s statutory officers;
 - Licensing Committee – Responsible for considering licensing policies and determining certain licensing applications where representations have been received;
 - Development Control Committee – Responsible for determining applications which in the opinion of the Senior Officer with responsibility for Planning, are of significant local importance, e.g. major housing development, or where either the Uplands or Lowlands area sub-committee proposes to make a decision which would be unlawful, seriously undermine policy, set adverse precedent or result in substantial costs being awarded against the Council.

- The Standards Sub-Committee – Responsible for dealing with matters relating to standards and ethics and to sit in the capacity of a hearing panel to, in consultation with an Independent Person, hear allegations that Members have failed to comply with the Member Code of Conduct. Two meeting dates are included in the programme but further meetings will be required if the sub-committee needs to meet as a hearing panel.
- Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committee and Licensing Panel meet as required to determine certain licensing applications. Regular dates are included in the programme which can be used for sub-committee meetings or panel hearings. These will be cancelled where there is no business and at times additional dates may be needed outside of the regular cycle of scheduled meeting dates.

5. FUTURE OXFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIP

- 5.1** The Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) is a joint committee comprising the leaders of the six councils of Oxfordshire, together with key strategic partners working together to deliver a better future for the county. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel is an informal panel comprising three non-executive members from each of the six councils and exists to provide oversight of the work of the FOP. The Council does not set meeting dates for the FOP or the FOP Scrutiny Panel, however the expected meeting dates are included in the draft programme at Annex A for completeness. Meetings of the FOP start at 1.00pm and virtual meetings of the FOP Scrutiny Panel start at 6.30pm.

6. MEETING START TIMES

- 6.1** No changes are proposed in this report to the current start times of meetings. Under the Council Procedure Rules at Part 5A of the Constitution, committees and sub-committees may vary the timing of their meetings at their first meeting of the municipal year. The existing start times are as follows:
- Council meetings are held at 2.00pm;
 - Overview and Scrutiny meetings start at 5.30pm;
 - Audit and Governance meetings are held at 6.00pm;
 - Development Control meetings start at 11.00am;
 - Planning Sub-committee meetings are held at 2.00pm;
 - Licensing Committee, Licensing Sub-Committee and Licensing Panel meetings start at 10.00am;
 - Standards Sub-Committee meetings start at 10.00am;
 - Executive meetings start at 2.00pm, however that is a matter for the Leader rather than Council.

7. TRAINING AND BRIEFING DATES

- 7.1** It is intended that a member training programme will be produced prior to the May 2024 local elections, which will articulate a member induction and training programme. There is also a programme of regular member briefings . This report seeks a delegation to the Democratic Services Business Manager to set training and briefing dates.

8. MEMBER WORKING GROUPS

- 8.1** The Council may establish informal cross-party member working groups to perform particular tasks. Recent examples include the Constitution Working Group and the Local Plan Cross-Party Member Working Group. This report seeks a delegation to the Democratic Services Business Manager to set meeting dates for current and future member working groups.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 9.1** Should Council wish to consider alternative proposals, it could request that a further report is presented to a future meeting.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1** Members are entitled to claim mileage expenses for attending meetings and such costs can be met from existing budgets. The number of meetings within the recommended meeting programme is similar to previous years. It is anticipated that the majority of training will be delivered internally and will not therefore have a financial impact. Council has allocated a budget of £4,000 per annum which is available to fund externally delivered training sessions and members' attendance at external training courses. There are no further direct financial implications.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1** The responsibility for setting meeting dates for Council and Committee meetings rests with Council under the Local Government Act 1972 (Schedule 12). In a year of ordinary elections the Annual Council meeting must be held on the eighth day after the retirement of councillors, or such other day within twenty-one days of the date of retirement. In non-election years the Annual Council meeting may be held on any date in March, April or May.

12. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 12.1** If Council did not agree a programme of meetings for 2024/25, there is significant risk that decision making would not be able to take place in a timely, effective and open & transparent manner. There are no other significant risks in relation to this report.

13. EQUALITIES IMPACT

13.1 The recommendations are not expected to differentially impact any groups with protected characteristics. Meetings are held in accessible venues.

14. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

Members are required to attend meetings in person, which will result in emissions associated with journeys to and from meetings. Members have the right to choose to have paper copies of agenda packs, however where possible, Members are strongly encouraged to access papers using the Modern.gov App or the Extranet.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

(END)