



## DISS TOWN COUNCIL

Council Offices, 11-12 Market Hill,  
Diss, Norfolk, IP22 4JZ.  
Telephone & Fax: (01379) 643848  
Email: [towncouncil@diss.gov.uk](mailto:towncouncil@diss.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.diss.gov.uk](http://www.diss.gov.uk)

Report Number:  
**12 /1920**

Report to:	Full Council
Date of Meeting:	11 <sup>th</sup> September 2019
Authorship:	Town Clerk
Subject:	Meeting Schedule

### Introduction

1. Herewith is the Clerk's review of the proposed meeting schedules and further proposal. It has been written after reviewing the meeting minutes relevant to this item, in discussion with the Deputy Town Clerk post the Action Group meeting & provides an Officer perspective.
2. At the May meeting of Council, it was agreed that given the reduction in councillor membership to 7, only monthly Council meetings would be scheduled, and all committee related items would form part of those agendas.
3. At the July meeting of Council, councillors considered the key Council documents list. It was agreed that reviewing each document during a Full Council meeting would be too time consuming given other items on the agenda. It was suggested that given the interest in co-option from the public, it would be prudent to re-introduce committee meetings.
4. At the extraordinary meeting of Council in August, a meeting schedule proposal from the Deputy Town Clerk was reviewed, which included 4 additional meetings per committee until May i.e. a total of 24 (see Appendix A). This is the equivalent of 30 meetings over a full 12 months. Councillors believed that having each committee meeting once every three months was not frequent enough. It was resolved that an Action Group of Chairs of committees, the Council Leader, Town Mayor and Deputy Town Clerk would consider a new meeting schedule and present it to the next Council meeting.
5. The Action Group has proposed a meeting schedule, which adds one additional meeting per year for the Executive and Facilities committees totalling 26 (Appendix B) or the equivalent of 32 meetings per year. This is a similar number of meetings scheduled during 2017/18 and two more than in 2018-19.

### Clerk's Proposal

6. The following proposal considers councillors views on the frequency of meetings, staff time in preparing & attending meetings and the most effective way of using staff and councillor time to achieve Council's aims.
7. This proposal retains the suggested 5 Executive & Facilities committee meetings per year, proposes 3 meetings annually for Infrastructure and reduces the number of Full Council meetings to 8 per year. Total number of meetings = 21 - an additional 9 meetings per year to the current monthly schedule and 5 (9 months) / 12 (year) less than the Action Group's proposal.
8. Appendix C sets out the proposed timetable.

## Benefits of Proposal

9. This proposal allows two weeks between each meeting allowing Officers enough time to draft reports and action decisions in between minute writing and the next agenda preparation.
10. It also allows committees to carry out their function within their delegated authority and therefore develop expertise on their areas of responsibility.
11. It is proposed that Full Council meets less frequently to consider those few decisions that must, legally be made by Full Council, any controversial issues that committees feel ought to be considered by Council and strategic issues that have already been scrutinised at committee level.
12. Full Council meetings have historically taken place monthly to approve payments and get cheques signed. DTC has been able to dispense with this requirement because decisions to spend money are made in Council or committee e.g. when a contract is let & specific Council authorisation for the payments is not necessary.
13. Fewer Full Council meetings should avoid the need to cancel committee meetings (due to insufficient business) given the tendency to add the committee required decisions to the Full Council agenda to expedite a decision.
14. This proposal provides opportunities to slot in additional working group meetings as required on the 'free' Wednesdays.
15. If the public and press are more likely to attend Full Council meetings, this will allow committees and/or working groups to discuss controversial issues in advance.
16. There are 22 key documents/actions for committees/Council to review/approve annually. This requires each meeting to consider approximately one per meeting, which should be more than achievable with the other agenda items.
17. By allocating routine topics to specific committee/Council agendas, each committee would have a forward plan of what it is going to discuss at which meeting throughout the year.

## Budget Setting

18. The budgeting process for 2019-20 worked very effectively and it is proposed that we follow a similar process for 2019-20 particularly given the new councillor and Officer membership.
19. In September and before the first scheduled Executive meeting, a small working group of councillors/Officers with the specialist knowledge review the existing budget and potential amendments for 2019-20.
20. This review is reported to the October Executive committee who will have the opportunity to comment and add further to the discussions.
21. The October Facilities meeting provides the opportunity for the committee responsible for the greatest expenditure to put forward their views before the revised budget (which has taken into consideration the comments from both the Executive and Facilities committees) is presented to the second Executive committee in November.
22. There is also an opportunity for the Infrastructure committee to review the budget at its earlier November meeting. Please note the items of expenditure allocated to this committee for 2018-19 are Parish Partnership Funding & a budget for a potential residents parking scheme.
23. Any further recommendations from the Executive committee are then set out within a written report to the December Full Council meeting for further tweaking. This avoids repetition of discussions at meetings.
24. This should result in a fully debated and tight budget proposal recommendation to be approved by the January Council meeting in order to meet the precept setting deadlines of around mid-January 2020.
25. Please note the Council's new RFO is due to start on 1<sup>st</sup> October.

## Infrastructure Committee

26. Given the powers of higher tier authorities to make decisions on infrastructure related issues, it is proposed that Council will have enough opportunity to consider how it might influence such decisions, which are often long-term projects, in three meetings per year.
27. In-between meetings of Town Councillors, it is proposed that working group meetings with higher tier authority representatives are held to more effectively progress such projects.

## Committee Membership

28. It is proposed to fix the size of each committee at seven members equivalent to 50% of Full Council once full membership (14 councillors) is reached.
29. Assuming the Town Mayor and Council Leader are ex-officio on each committee, five seats on each of three committees remain for the other councillors (of which there should be 12). That means that each councillor will be on one committee except for three "lucky" councillors (in addition potentially to the planning sub-committee).
30. This will reduce any confusion over committee membership and allow each committee to develop expertise in their areas of responsibility. Not being a member of a committee does not preclude a councillor from getting involved in the work of that committee through its working groups. The bulk of Council work takes place outside of meetings. All meeting agendas are distributed to all councillors.
31. It should also foster a better understanding of the principle of delegation to committees. Where something is the responsibility of two committees (e.g. Facilities want to do something that hasn't been allocated in the budget, Executive can consider a virement or use of reserves), it will be a different set of councillors (except for the ex-officio councillors) considering it each time.
32. In the meantime, given 11 councillors, it is proposed to fix the size of each committee at five or six members, equivalent to 50% of the existing Full Council membership as per point 29. This means that the committee size will increase to 7 with the remaining three new councillors.

### Option A

33. In order to achieve 5 members per committee (quorum is 3), there are a total of 15 seats to fill. With the Mayor & Leader ex-officio on all 3, 9 councillors will need to fill the remaining 9 seats i.e. each councillor joins one committee.

### Option B

34. In order to achieve 6 members per committee, there are a total of 18 seats to fill. With the Mayor & Leader ex-officio on all 3, 9 councillors will need to fill the remaining 12 seats i.e. three councillors will need to be members of two committees.
35. Given that councillors have already put forward their committee preferences and the number of members per committee exceeds the proposed membership limit, it is proposed that members are allocated via a draw. To ensure that each councillor gets the opportunity to sit on a committee of choice, membership should be reviewed annually.

## Other Points for Consideration

36. Since the decision was taken to reduce the number of meetings, the June meeting finished at 21:15, the July meeting at 20:57 and the extraordinary August meeting at 21.30. Two from the three meetings have finished within the two-hour time limit.
37. No items on these agendas have been deferred other than those requiring additional information for decisions to be made.
38. It is proposed that the agenda packs are distributed to councillors on the Monday instead of the Thursday prior to the meetings (see last row in Appendix C). This will provide three days for councillors to review the agenda packs and pass on any comments to Officers before they are publicised. This should allow for missing information to be provided & any errors

corrected before they are picked up by the public/press and should also ensure that decisions are made at the meeting and not deferred.

39. The re-introduction of the Clerks' weekly updates should help councillors and staff feel more informed of progress in-between meetings.
40. When moving to monthly meetings of Full Council, it was agreed that only those items requiring decisions would be incorporated. This allowed for all business to be covered given the reduction in scheduled meetings. Item updates are included in the progress report and as referred to in point 39 above. This has reduced repeated discussions in meetings and duplication in meeting minutes and it is strongly recommended that this agenda format continues with the re-introduction of committee meetings.

<b>Recommendations:</b>	a)	To approve the proposed Schedule of Meetings (Appendix C)
	b)	To fix the size of committee membership at five / six
	c)	To increase the size of committee membership to seven once Full Council membership is reached
	d)	To receive and comment to the Clerks on the agenda packs by midday on the Thursday before the meetings
	e)	To include only those items requiring a decision on an agenda for all meetings.