

Feedback from other councils:

Nottingham City Council

1. Themed Meetings

The council they have worked very hard at various types of themed meetings and while it has been interesting and useful for councillors and they have had some good debates with partners, none have yet brought the public in any numbers.

The Constitution includes a clause on themed meetings:

“Within its schedule of ordinary meetings, the Council may hold special themed meetings involving representatives from other organisations, such as State of the City debates. In addition, to enable full participation of all councillors in the planning stage of the Council’s key strategy documents (the Policy Framework); the Lord Mayor may determine that such discussions should occur at ‘Council in Committee’ sessions. The Deputy Lord Mayor will normally preside at ‘Council in Committee’ meetings. These meetings are public meetings subject to the requirements set out in Section 4 (Access to Information).”

In total there are 10 full council meetings per year of which one is the Annual meeting with the normal provision for extraordinary meetings if required. Meetings are normally held at 2pm but the constitution gives discretion to the Lord Mayor to change this if required.

The Scrutiny Team use the annual council business plan with scrutiny chairs to help determine the timing of policy framework items appearance at scrutiny so that scrutiny feeds into policy development at an early stage.

2. Business Steering Group

The business steering group had been more of a success. It's an informal meeting a week before the council meeting and its core role is to allocate times to agenda items.

The council’s political composition is 37, 7, 6 and both the small parties have seats on the business steering group. The steering group appears to have smoothed the running of council meetings. They also maintain a council annual business plan with the policy framework items sketched out and the business steering group uses that to plan future meetings.

The biggest change has been tight control over speaker times.

3. Petitions

They are just about to have their first petition (Building Schools for the Future - 5K signatures) and the petitioner will be allowed to introduce it rather than a councillor.

Birmingham City Council

1 Themed meetings

Has an indicative annual forward plan of policy framework items

The constitution states the following:

"From September 2005, the Leader of the Council will, on an annual basis, lead a "State of the City" debate and, during the Municipal Year, in accordance with a timetable agreed by the Council Business Management Committee, the Cabinet Members and other Lead Members (i.e. the Lord Mayor's Annual Report to the AGM, Chairmen of the Co-ordinating Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Regulatory Committees, a Lead Chairman for the Constituency Committees and Lead Members from the WMPTA, WM Fire & Rescue Authority and the WM Police Authority) shall report to the City Council on the progress, or otherwise, of their respective Roles and Responsibilities (as set out in the City Council's Constitution (Volume A, Part 2 H)).

(2) The time allowed "to debate and receive the Report" for this item shall, unless otherwise agreed by the Council, be as follows:-

Lord Mayor's Annual Report to the AGM – not exceeding 15 minutes;

Cabinet Member Report – not exceeding 40 minutes; and

Other Lead Member Report – not exceeding 30 minutes

(3) As the purpose of these changes are to encourage open and transparent local governance, with a view to making improvements to City Council meetings and enriching the role of City Councillors, the Reports will be debated and no amendment to the Motion "to receive the Report" will be allowed, as to do so will limit the time allocated for debate.

(4) Furthermore, where such a Member is presenting his / her Annual Report, such a Member will not be asked a question relating to his / her Roles and Responsibilities under Standing Order 12 (B).

(5) For Joint Authorities, it will be normal practice for the Committee Manager to invite the relevant Chief Officer to attend the City Council meeting for the item and for him / her to be available to answer any questions / comments from the City Council, as part of the participative debate. The relevant Chief Officer will, of course, be free to determine who from his / her organisation should attend to answer any questions / comments from Members. Members should not see this as an inquisitorial session, but a constructive and meaningful engagement with the relevant Joint Authority."

Business Management Committee established in the Constitution – already circulated.

2. Business Management Committee (see terms of reference below)

This committee has the three Leaders, three deputy leaders, the group secretaries, and OSC chair (non voting)

Works out the plan for the year (forward plan) and the timetable for cabinet members visiting full Council. They also look at individual Full Council agendas for balance – for example they decided it was too full December deferred an item. They consider the timings for items, such as a Scrutiny report. They find it a useful exercise.

3. Petitions

Have had 22 but none have reached the threshold to reach full Council.

Bath & North East Somerset

1 Agenda planning process

The four group leaders meet regularly with the Chief Executive. They devise the agenda (forward plan) for the Council yearly which is then communicated to officers and groups.

They also meet prior to Full Council and decide the priority and timings of items. The Mayor is then briefed on the outcome.

Full Council is seen as the vehicle for all members; cabinet as the vehicle for the Administration.

2 Informal session

The informal session were considered useful, however the administration changed political control and they decided to reduce Full Council from 7 to 4 meetings per year (plus ad hoc meetings) and that meant they needed the extra hour for formal business.

The informal sessions were semi structured but not part of the decision making process. They are chaired by the mayor and with a topic and prearranged content.

One particularly useful meeting cited was when they invited all the young people who were standing for Youth Council to present a short speech and then engage in a question and answer session with members. Apparently this was very useful as an exercise in understanding the concerns of young people.

I asked if Members had felt ambushed and the officer said he did not think so because they were still chaired and attendees were invited to speak and regulated, but it was informal enough to allow and promote dialogue and discussion. The officer thought they worked well.

3 Involve members early in policy worked.

The Council had taken a number of policies and plans to Full Council prior to going to Cabinet for decision and he said this had involved more members in decision making successfully.

The officer gave the example two strategies for Schools that had been difficult because it entailed closing or refurbishing certain schools. The first one had dealt with primary schools in clusters. This had first been sent to Scrutiny so they could do some detailed background work on the issues, and then went to Cabinet for decision. The Secondary school strategy had been done as a block. First it went to Scrutiny, then Assembly for full debate and then Cabinet for decision.

The officer felt this had enabled members to fully participate, understand the need for change and participate in decision making.

E. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF COUNCIL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE,

THE COUNCIL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Meetings of the full Council

1. To be responsible for the planning and preparation of the agenda, papers and other arrangements for meetings of the Council.
2. To submit recommendations to the Council, as appropriate, as to the appointment of committees and other bodies and as to the functions and membership of such bodies.
3. To discharge the role of submitting motions to the Council as set out in Standing Order 6 (B) of the Standing Orders relating to the Council and Committees.

Council Appointments to Outside Bodies

4. To submit recommendations to the Council as to the appointment or nomination of persons to serve on outside bodies (where such

appointments or nominations fall to be made by the full Council) and in cases of urgency (as determined by the Committee), to make such appointments or nominations, subject to reporting the details to the next Council meeting for information.

Civic/Ceremonial

5. To submit recommendations to the Council, as appropriate, as to the conferment of rights and privileges – e.g. Honorary Alderman, Freedom of the City, etc.
6. To consider and determine any related matters – e.g. applications to use the City's Coat of Arms.

Constitutional Matters

7. To oversee all the necessary work (including conducting any necessary Community Governance reviews and dealing with any petition issues) to comply with the Council's Constitutional duties under relevant Local Government Act(s) and to approve Overview & Scrutiny Reports where they have been agreed by the Executive in accordance with Standing Orders.
8. To keep the Council's Constitutional arrangements under review and to approve any in year changes relating to the non-Executive arrangements of the Constitution.
9. As part of the Committee's function under 8 above, to submit recommendations to the Council, as and when appropriate, as to the adoption of new or amended Standing Orders.

Members' Services and Allowances

10. To be responsible for all aspects of services to members.
11. To keep under review the Council's Allowances Scheme (made under Section 18 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989) and all other matters relating to members' allowances.
12. To oversee the Council's relationship with the Independent Remuneration Panel and to submit recommendations to the Council, both as to the operation and membership of the Panel and as to amendments to the Allowances Scheme (in conjunction with reports from the Panel).

Electoral Matters, Parish Councils & Boundary Changes

13. To discharge the Council's various electoral duties under the Representation of the People Acts.
14. To discharge the Council's functions, in relation to parishes and parish councils, under Part II of the Local Government & Rating Act 1997 and related Local Government legislation.
15. To discharge the Council's functions under Part IV of the Local Government Act 1972 and Part II of the Local Government Act 1992 (relating to boundary reviews and alterations) and related Local Government legislation.

Appeals & Reviews

16. To oversee, and be responsible for, all arrangements for appeals and reviews (including internal personnel appeals) which fall to the Council to arrange, including the appointment of all necessary appeal and review bodies.

Certain Staff Appointments

17. To be responsible for arrangements relating to the appointment of (a) the Head of the Paid Service, and (b) all other statutory and non-statutory Chief or Deputy Chief Officers designated pursuant to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 2001. (**NOTE:** A list of the Chief and Deputy Chief Officer posts so designated is appended to the Employee Procedure Rules set out in **Volume B: Part 2** of this Document).

Certain Financial & other Matters

18. To consider any recommendations from the Audit Committee relating to the discharge the Council's duty, under the Accounts & Audits Regulations 1996.
19. To discharge the Council's functions, relating to pensions, under the Superannuation Acts.
20. To authorise the making of payments, under Section 92 of the Local Government Act 2000, on account of maladministration.

21. To oversee the arrangements for authorising foreign travel by members and officers of the Council (see note below) and to receive general monitoring reports on relevant financial matters.

Specific statutory functions

22. To exercise the powers, duties and functions of the Council in accordance with relevant legislation.

NOTES:

1. The Council Business Management Committee is authorised, under Standing Order 24 of the Standing Orders relating to the Council and Committees, to appoint sub-committees for the purposes of its functions relating to **Appeals & Reviews** and **Certain Staff Appointments**, as mentioned in Paragraphs 17 and 18 above.
2. The following Sub-Committees of the Council Business Management Committee are approved for the current Municipal Year:-
 - (i) Appointments
 - (ii) Personnel Appeals
 - (iii) Education Awards
 - (iv) Education Staffing
 - (v) Miscellaneous Appeals
3. The foreign travel arrangements have been delegated to an authorised member of the Council Business Management Committee, who is required to report his/her decisions, on a quarterly basis from December 2002, to the Council Business Management Committee for ratification purposes. For the avoidance of doubt, as the decisions of the authorised member of the Committee are non-Executive decisions, the same can not be 'called-in' by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.