

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE:	<b>Council</b>
DATE:	<b>24 March, 2010</b>
DIRECTOR:	<b>Director of Corporate Governance</b>
TITLE OF REPORT:	<b>Committee Structures – Six Month Review</b>
REPORT NUMBER:	<b>CG/10/031</b>

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To meet the instruction of Council to review the operation of the new committee structures six months after they were implemented in August, 2009.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended:-

- (i) that the committee cycle revert to being one of eight weeks rather than six, and that one of the revised calendars of meetings circulated as appendices be approved for the remainder of 2010, which includes changing the order of committees within the cycle;
- (ii) that Council determine if the present committee structures be continued, particularly in relation to the Finance and Resources and Corporate Policy and Performance Committees, if the Budget Monitoring Board should be disbanded and if any changes require to be made to the Orders of Reference; and
- (iii) that Council determine if it wishes to make any further changes to Standing Orders, beyond those which will be necessitated by the introduction of the new Heads of Service structure and the clarification of what constitutes a Point of Order (which will require the suspension of Standing Order 22(1) as the revised Standing Orders were approved within the last six months).

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There will be efficiency savings accruing from the change from the six week cycle to an eight week cycle arising from a reduction in paper costs, etc. and opportunity savings in that time of both officers and members will be freed for other duties, and this is addressed further in the body of the report.

## **4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT**

By reverting to an eight week committee cycle, there will be particular benefits for the City Chamberlain and her team in that time will be freed at the two most important parts of the year for them, namely at the time of the preparation of the year end accounts and at the time of preparatory work on the annual budget. The Director of Education, Culture and Sport has also identified benefits to her service if the Service Committee met later in the cycle. In terms of Standing Orders, these will now be amended to reflect the new Heads of Service structure.

## **5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

By reverting to an eight week cycle, planning for the submission of reports to Council and to Committee will become more crucial in that there will be fewer meetings to report to; however, report management has improved significantly over the past 18 months or so with the number of late reports being reduced dramatically and with the Corporate Management Team playing a more significant role in guiding reports through the Committee process. Nevertheless, the possibility remains that there will be more urgent issues arising, particularly in relation to the submission of responses to consultation, and such issues may require meetings of the Urgent Business Committee to be held or other processes to be put in place in order that timescales can be met.

## **6. REPORT**

### **6.1 Length of Committee Cycle**

**6.1.1** When the Council changed from an eight week cycle to a six week cycle in June, 2007, two additional committee cycles were inserted around the time of the Easter break and in late October/November; the latter change meant that the final cycle of the year effectively became a four week one and this has proven to be a particularly pressured time for officers and members given that much of the preparatory work for the annual budget is being undertaken during this period with a view to reporting the financial strategy to the December meetings of the Finance and Resources Committee and Full Council. In addition, the cycle added around the time of the Easter break coincides with the preparation of the end of year accounts by the City Chamberlain's staff which again presents its own difficulties for them.

**6.1.2** When the shorter committee cycle was introduced, it was envisaged that the benefits would include more efficient responses to consultation and a reduction in the number of late reports being submitted; the question of deadlines for consultative responses has been touched upon in section 5 above, and the number of late reports has been dealt with through better report management and a greater role being undertaken by CMT. It is

therefore not envisaged that a return to an eight week cycle will see any increase in the number of late reports submitted.

- 6.1.3** The move to a shorter cycle brought with it some additional issues, probably the most significant being that the cyclical reports (such as performance reports and budget monitoring reports) were being prepared before the previous report had been considered by Committee and so the opportunity to provide updated information between committee cycles was often limited and on occasion led to virtually the same information being presented to consecutive committees. In some cases, draft reports are issued using the information submitted to the previous cycle with updated information only becoming available shortly before the deadline for the preparation of the final report and it is envisaged that such additional work would be removed by reverting to an eight week cycle. From a financial perspective, fewer meetings would allow greater time for the financial analysis of information; more widely across the Council, an eight week cycle would allow for better work planning.
- 6.1.4** Of course, the majority of reports associated with the two cycles which would be deleted would require to be submitted to the cycle preceding or following the deleted cycle; the savings which accrue would be a result of the removal of the cyclical reports, i.e. those relating to performance monitoring, financial monitoring, grant applications, minutes and committee business/ motions lists etc. These amount to approximately 20% of reports and so the savings would be worthwhile; other advantages would be that more meeting accommodation would be freed up and there would be fewer diary clashes for both members and officers. The benefits of freeing up member and officer time should also not be underestimated – with possibly 20 senior officers attending some of the larger committees each cycle, the time freed up through not being required to attend two cycles, even if it is only taken to be 20% of each committee's time, is significant.
- 6.1.5** Appended to this report are three options for a revised calendar of meetings for the remainder of 2010. The first two propose deleting two cycles this year including the next one (April/May); one of these – option A - incorporates an additional period free of meetings around the expected time of this year's General Election. Option B dispenses with this period and so the summer recess begins earlier. The third option - C - was submitted as the Liberal Democrat Group response to consultation on this report and envisages the change taking place after the summer recess, with only one cycle being deleted this year, and proposes a re-ordering of committees within the cycle.

## **6.2 Committees and Orders of Reference**

**6.2.1** When Council approved the new committee structures on 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2009 (Article 7 of the Minute of Meeting refers) it was agreed that a review be undertaken six months after its introduction in August, particularly in relation to the operation of the Finance and Resources and Corporate Policy and Performance Committees. Whilst it is for members to determine whether the new structure should remain unchanged or not, it is worth noting that the Finance and Resources Committee continues to be the largest committee from the point of view of the size of the agenda and that the Corporate Policy and Performance Committee has had before it a number of significant policy matters which have entailed detailed discussions.

**6.2.2** Members are also invited to consider whether the Orders of Reference require to be amended in any way and it is suggested that the following changes are worthy of consideration:-

- (a) In June, 2009, it was not considered that the Budget Monitoring Board would continue to meet to the extent to which it has and its remit was effectively incorporated into the Orders of Reference of the Finance and Resources Committee, despite the Board itself reporting directly to Council. Members may now wish to agree to disband the Budget Monitoring Board; if not, the Orders of Reference of the Finance and Resources Committee should be amended.
- (b) One element of the Finance and Resources Committee's Orders of Reference at 6(e) (b) states "to undertake action to deliver cost reductions or income generation to achieve a balanced budget" – is this something which should perhaps sit with Service Committees?

## **6.3 Standing Orders**

**6.3.1** The Council's Standing Orders have been revised over two recent cycles (30<sup>th</sup> September, 2009, Article 13 of the Minute refers and 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2009, Articles 9,10 and 11 refer) at which time it was noted that further changes would require to be made to reflect the new Heads of Service structure. It is suggested that the Chief Executive be authorised to approve such changes without the need for Standing Orders to be referred back to Council for approval; however, members may wish to take the opportunity to make any further revisions.

**6.3.2** At the meeting of Council of 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2010, the Lord Provost requested that advice be provided on what constituted a Point of Order. It is suggested that Standing Order 18(3) be expanded to clarify that a Point of Order is only a query as to whether procedures are being followed properly.

## **6.4 Start Times of Meetings**

- 6.4.1** Whilst members have raised the question of start times for meetings in the past, Standing Orders allow the Lord Provost or Convener to vary such times from the timetable agreed by Council where there is good cause.

## **7. AUTHORISED SIGNATURE**

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## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.