



**Report of the Head of Democratic Services**  
**Democratic Services Committee - 30 January 2018**  
**Timing of Council Meetings - Survey**

<b>Purpose:</b>	To provide the outcome of the Councillors Survey on Timing of Council Meetings.
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	None.
<b>Consultation:</b>	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It is recommended that:  1) The findings in relation to the timing of council meetings survey be considered.
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Authority to undertake a survey of Councillors regarding the timing and frequency of Council meetings at least once during each term of administration. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 - Statutory Guidance is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 1.2 Following the Local Government Elections in May 2017, it was deemed appropriate not to conduct the survey immediately following the election in order to allow Councillors to have some time to understand the requirements of being a Councillor and the time commitment which it commands. As such, the Head of Democratic Services delayed the survey until 21 December 2017 with the survey ending on 12 January 2018.
- 1.3 The survey was compiled as an online questionnaire and a copy of the survey and results is attached as **Appendix B**. 60 of the Authority's 72 Councillors (83.33%) completed the survey.

## 2. Outcome of the Councillor Timing of Council Meetings Survey

### 2.1 Question 1. "Do you prefer Morning, Afternoon, Evening or meetings at anytime?"

Morning Meetings was the highest with 19 Councillors supporting it. A further 14 Councillors supported meetings at anytime.

### 2.2 Question 2. "What times are you available for Morning, Afternoon and Evening Committee Meetings (Not Council)?"

- 10.00 x 21 Councillors;
- 14.00 x 28 Councillors;
- 17.00 x 27 Councillors.

### 2.3 Question 3. "Do you have difficulty in attending a meeting at a specific day or time? If yes, what are those day(s) / time(s)?"

- No x 13;
- Monday x 5;
- Friday x 5;
- Early Morning x 4.

### 2.4 Question 4. "What issues do you have that causes those difficulties? (e.g. Age, Gender, Religion, Having Caring Responsibilities or being in Employment?)"

As expected Employment (13) and Caring Responsibilities (12) were the two main reasons for causing difficulties in meeting attendance. It is this area that Council must be mindful of when setting the Council Bodies diary for 2018-2019 and beyond.

### 2.5 Question 5. "What times are you available for Council Meetings?"

- 10.00 x 24 Councillors;
- 14.00 x 24 Councillors;
- 17.00 x 31 Councillors.

### 2.6 Question 6. "What weekdays are you available to attend Meetings?"

- Monday x 50 Councillors;
- Tuesday x 54 Councillors;
- Wednesday x 53 Councillors;
- Thursday x 56 Councillors;
- Friday x 40 Councillors.

### **3. Interpreting the Outcome of the Timing of Council Meetings Survey**

- 3.1 The outcomes of the survey are clear in that 10.00, 14.00 and 17.00 are the favoured times to hold meetings with Friday being the least popular day. However an element of the survey is to support Councillors' needs and engage with employers to try and attract more candidates from the employed workforce. Meetings should not continue to be held at the same time simply out of inertia. What may have been tradition or an arrangement which suited the previous generation of Councillors may not necessarily serve the interests of Councillors.
- 3.2 The Authority must consider the needs of those Councillors in employments and with caring responsibilities etc. and seek to find a way to ensure that timings of meetings are accessible. Consideration could be given to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility to please all Councillors all of the time. Any such arrangements will, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public, as such moves can easily lead to confusion.
- 3.3 Having regard for the above, it is proposed that there is no change to our current timings and frequency arrangements of the Committee or Council meetings. The timing of Cabinet Meetings will be discussed with the Leader of the Council.
- 3.4 The views of the Committee are sought on the responses to the Survey. These views will be used to assist the Presiding Member and Leader of the Council to compile the draft Council Bodies Diary 2018-2019 which will be presented to Council in due course.
- 3.5 Current practice sees Council setting the dates and times of Committees and if required, Committees may at their first meeting seek to amend the times for the remainder of the year. This works reasonably well but can cause knock on problems when Committee times are amended. Issues such as room bookings, linking with Scrutiny and other bodies such as the Public Service Board and Western Bay link the timings and dates of their meetings to formal Committee meetings.
- 3.6 There may be a need to amend the Council Constitution if greater flexibility is required.
- 3.7 Whilst there are no workforce impacts associated with this report, any change to existing meeting arrangements may also have implications for those Officers who attend meetings of the Council.

#### **4. Equality and Engagement Implications**

- 4.1 An EIA screening form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full EIA report is not required. Due consideration must be given to those in employment and those with caring responsibilities. This is a matter that the Democratic Services Committee and Council will consider in due course. It is also important to note that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales has determined that each Authority may pay up to £403 per month to a Councillor in order to assist them with the Reimbursement of Costs of Care. It is important that the Head of Democratic Services reminds Councillors of this potential assistance.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no specific financial implications associated with this report.

#### **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

**Background Papers:** None.

#### **Appendices:**

- Appendix A** Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 - Statutory Guidance  
**Appendix B** Timings of Council Meetings Survey - Councillor Responses

**Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 – Statutory Guidance**

**Chapter 1. Timing of Council Meetings**

- 1.1 Part 1 of the Measure contains provisions related to the strengthening of local democracy. More specifically, Chapter 1 of this Part deals with “promoting and supporting membership of local authorities” and section 6 relates to the timing of meetings.
- 1.2 These provisions flowed from proposals developed in the report of the Councillor Commission Expert Panel *Wales Are We Being Served?* published in 2009. It included a number of recommendations aimed at making local government service more attractive to a more diverse cross-section of the adult population. These included laying greater emphasis on the roles of “backbench” councillors, including through the introduction of remote access to council meetings, a review of councillors’ time commitments, a bi-annual survey to establish councillors’ support needs and engaging with employers to try and attract more candidates from the employed workforce.
- 1.3 In this context, the times at which meetings of the local authority take place is of considerable significance as it can affect the extent to which individuals may contemplate standing for election.
- 1.4 This is statutory guidance issued in accordance with section 6 (1) of the Measure. By virtue of section 6 (2) of the Measure, local authorities must have regard to this guidance in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings of a local authority are held. The relevant meetings in the context of this guidance are meetings of the full council and any committee or sub-committee of the council.
- 1.5 Only members of council executives are considered to be “full-time” councillors and this is reflected in the levels of payments that they are currently entitled to for their special responsibilities. By contrast, non-executive members are considered to undertake the equivalent of a part-time role, which will, in many cases, need to be fitted around whatever other commitments councillors may have.
- 1.6 The Expert Panel found that, although many councillors are retired, others had difficulty in marrying their work commitments with those of their council duties, or, in other cases, did so at the expense of any meaningful personal time.
- 1.7 For many prospective councillors in full-time employment, the extent to which their employers are supportive of their new commitment is a vital concern. Although employment legislation entitles councillors to time off for public duties, operating that in practice may be more difficult.

- 1.8 The timing and frequency of meetings is the most problematic issue in this respect. Other duties may be fulfilled at times which suit the individual but a meeting is at a set time and (subject to any arrangements made for remote attendance) at a set venue.
- 1.9 It is neither practical nor desirable for the Welsh Government to prescribe the times and frequency of meetings of the full council, committees and sub-committees as these are matters for each local authority to consider in individual circumstances. However, it is important that local authorities do not simply continue to hold their meetings at the same time as they always have done simply out of inertia. What may have been tradition or an arrangement which suited the previous generation of councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the new intake.
- 1.10 All local authorities should review the times at which meetings are held at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new council is elected. The rule of thumb should be that meetings will be held at times, intervals and locations which are convenient to its members and as far as is practicable have regard to equality and diversity issues. Councils should find ways of surveying their members, at least after each election, to assess their preferences and should be committed to act on the conclusions. The survey should be carried out within three months of ordinary elections. It will be for each authority to decide on the regularity of such surveys.
- 1.11 Although this process could result in long-serving councillors having to make changes to their pattern of working that would be worth doing if it meant that the council was better able to retain new councillors with outside responsibilities.
- 1.12 Issues to be taken into account in conducting a survey could include:
- Whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred.
  - Whether particular times cause difficulties for councillors with particular characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, having caring responsibilities or being in employment.
- 1.13 As a result of the survey, local authorities should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of pleasing all their members all of the time. Any such arrangements will, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public.

**Timings of Council Meetings Survey - Councillor Responses  
21 December 2017 - 12 January 2018**

**Do you prefer Morning, Afternoon, Evening or meetings at anytime? (59 Responses)**

<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>Evening</b>	<b>Anytime</b>
19 (32.2%)	11 (18.6%)	15 (25.4%)	14 (23.7%)

**What times are you available for Morning, Afternoon and Evening Committee meetings (Not Council)? (Please tick all that apply)**

**Morning (44 Responses)**

<b>08.00</b>	<b>09.00</b>	<b>10.00</b>	<b>Other (Give Time)</b>
4 (9.1%)	13 (29.5%)	21 (47.7%)	6 (13.6%)

**Notes:**

- 09.30 onwards x 4
- Not before 09.30 as I take my daughter to nursery (school)
- 09.00 and 10.00 x 1
- 10.00 onwards x 1
- Anytime x 2

**Afternoon (49 Responses)**

<b>14.00</b>	<b>15.00</b>	<b>16.00</b>	<b>Other (Give Time)</b>
28 (57.1%)	4 (8.2%)	13 (26.5%)	4 (8.2%)

**Notes:**

- Anytime x 2
- 14.00-18.00 x 1
- All x 1
- Anytime after Midday except Mondays x 1

**Evening (43 Responses)**

<b>17.00</b>	<b>17.30</b>	<b>18.00</b>	<b>Other (Give Time)</b>
27 (62.8%)	3 (7%)	9 (20.9%)	4 (9.3%)

**Notes:**

- 18.00-21.00 x 1
- All x 1
- Anytime x 1
- Anytime except Mondays x 1
- None x 1
- None preferably as too many evening meetings x 1
- Any meetings before 18.30 cause childcare problems x 1

**Do you have difficulty in attending a meeting at a specific day or time? If yes, what are those day(s) / time(s)?**

- No x 13
- No, as long as I have sufficient notice x 1
- Monday x 5
- Monday 17.30-18.30 x 1
- Tuesday x 3
- Tuesday 17.30-18.30 x 1
- Wednesday x 2
- Wednesday Morning before 14.30 x 1
- Wednesday 11.30-15.30 x 1
- Wednesday 15.00-18.30 x 1
- Wednesday Late Afternoon x 1
- Thursday x 1
- Thursday Morning x 1
- Thursday 11.30-15.30 x 1
- Thursday 17.30-18.30 x 1
- Friday x 5
- Friday 11.30- 15.30 x 1
- Friday Afternoon (Grandchild Minding) x 1
- Friday Evening x 1
- Monday to Friday 09.00-16.00 x 1
- Mornings - Monday to Sunday 05.00-12.00 & Some Evenings 17.00-20.00 x 1
- Early Morning x 4
- Early morning meetings are difficult as I assist my disabled husband x 1
- Mornings x 1
- Meetings during working day x 1
- School Start and Finish Times (09.00 & 15.00) x 2
- Evenings as I have to rely on public transport x 1
- Middle of Day 11.00-16.00 x 1
- 09.00-16.00 x 1
- 12.00-14.00 x 1
- 13.00 x 1
- 15.00-16.00 x 2
- Before 15.30 x 1

**What issues do you have that causes those difficulties? (e.g. Age, Gender, Religion, Having Caring Responsibilities or being in employment?)**

- Employment x 13
- Caring Responsibilities x 12
- None x 5
- Caring / Employment x 2
- Children in School x 1
- Disability x 1
- Employment (Working 07.30-15.30) x 1



- Health x 2
- Self Employed (Evening Cover easier to arrange than Morning Cover) x 1
- Transport (No evening bus after 18.00) x 1
- Ward Work & Traffic x 1

**What times are you available for Council Meetings? (Please tick all that apply).**

**Morning (39 Responses)**

08.00	09.00	10.00	Other (Give Time)
5 (12.8%)	7 (17.9%)	24 (61.5%)	3 (7.7%)

**Notes:**

- Anytime x 5
- 09.00 onwards x 1
- 09.30 x 1
- 11.00 x 1
- Anytime but not Monday's x 1
- Thanks x 1

**Afternoon (43 Responses)**

14.00	15.00	16.00	Other (Give Time)
24 (55.8%)	4 (9.3%)	14 (32.6%)	1 (2.3%)

**Notes:**

- Anytime x 6
- Anytime after Midday x 1
- Anytime but not 16.00 on a Wednesday x 1

**Evening (44 Responses)**

17.00	17.30	18.00	Other (Give Time)
31 (70.5%)	3 (6.8%)	8 (18.2%)	2 (4.5%)

**Notes:**

- Anytime x 5
- 15.30 onwards x 1
- Any meetings before 18.30 cause childcare problems x 1

**What weekdays are you available to attend Meetings? (Please tick all that apply).**

Monday	50 (84.7%)
Tuesday	54 (91.5%)
Wednesday	53 (89.8%)
Thursday	56 (94.9%)
Friday	40 (67.85)