



Report of the Head of Democratic Services

Council – 30 March 2023

Timing of Council Meetings - Survey & Council Bodies Diary 2023-2024

Purpose:	To present a draft Council Bodies Diary 2023-20240.
Policy Framework:	None.
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The draft Council Bodies Diary 2023-2024 be adopted subject to final approval at the Annual Meeting of Council on 18 May 2023.
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1. Introduction

1.1 The Council Constitution states that the Council Diary must be approved at the Annual Meeting of Council each year. However, to ensure a seamless continuation of the democratic process and for Committee Rooms to be booked a draft Council Diary is presented to Council for earlier consideration but this is subject to final ratification at the Annual Meeting of Council.

2. Timing of Council Meetings Survey

2.1 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**.

2.2 The Head of Democratic Services carried out the survey online between 12-29 January 2023. Twenty-four Councillors responded to the survey. The survey and results are attached at **Appendix B**.

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

3.1 There is no clear consensus for a favoured meeting time; however, meetings that commence late afternoon or early evening are preferred. The favoured times tend to range from 4.00-6.00pm. If a meeting is held in the morning, 10.00am is preferred.

3.2 The responses show that Councillors are generally happy to attend meetings on Monday-Thursday, with Friday being the least popular option.

3.3 The purpose of the survey is to support Councillors' needs so that they can carry out their role as Councillors whilst juggling their employment, caring responsibilities, or other need. 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.

3.4 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.

3.5 Current practice sees Council setting the dates and times of Committees and if required, Committees may seek to amend the start 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 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. Council Bodies Diary 2019-2020

4.1 The Head of Democratic Services has considered the responses to the Timing of Council Meetings - Survey and consulted with the Presiding Member and Leader of the Council in producing this draft Council Bodies Diary.

4.2 The Council Bodies Diary 2023-2024 is attached as **Appendix C**. The Annual Meeting of Council on 18 May 2023 will be asked to ratify the Diary in line with the Council Constitution.

5. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 5.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.
- 5.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 5.4 An IIA Screening Form has been completed and no adverse implications have been noted.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no 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
Appendix C	Council Bodies Diary 2023-2024

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 (24)
12-29 January 2023**

Do you prefer Morning, Afternoon, Evening or meetings at anytime?

Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Anytime
2 (8.7%)	9 (39.1%)	12 (52.2%)	6 (26.1%)

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

Morning

08.00	09.00	10.00	Other (Give Time)
2 (25.0%)	2 (25.0%)	6 (75.0%)	1 (12.5%)

Afternoon

14.00	15.00	16.00	Other (Give Time)
8 (53.3%)	5 (33.3%)	9 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Evening

17.00	17.30	18.00	Other (Give Time)
11 (68.8%)	12 (75.0%)	13 (81.3%)	0 (0.0%)

Comments:

- After 11am preferred x1
- Generally, later in the day is easier x1

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

- Around School drop off / pick up times x1
- Friday day x1
- Work Wednesday-Friday 8.30am-4.30pm. Struggle to attend during these times x1
- Meetings during day between 7.30am-15.30pm due to work commitments x1
- Meetings in middle of the day x1
- Monday-Friday 9am-5pm x2
- Monday-Thursday – 9am-5pm x1
- Mornings x1
- Mornings & Afternoons. Monday-Friday x1
- No / N/A x5
- Varies depending on college timetable x1
- Wednesday afternoon & All-day Friday x1
- Wednesdays are difficult x1
- Weekday mornings are harder to get off work x1

- Working week during work hours x1
- Yes, between 3.30-6pm x1

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

- Employment x9
- Care Responsibilities x3
- Caring Responsibility & Employment x2
- Educational Study x1
- Running Pontarddulais Food Bank x1
- None x1
- N/A x2
- Social Activities in Evening, so not normally an early riser x1

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

Morning

08.00	09.00	10.00	Other (Give Time)
4 (30.8%)	5 (38.5%)	10 (76.9%)	2 (15.4%)

Afternoon

14.00	15.00	16.00	Other (Give Time)
12 (63.2%)	10 (52.6%)	14 (73.7%)	1 (5.3%)

Evening

17.00	17.30	18.00	Other (Give Time)
18 (81.8%)	17 (77.3%)	17 (77.3%)	2 (9.1%)

Comments:

- 5pm onwards for Wednesday-Friday. Anytime Monday, Afternoons only on Tuesday x1
- After 11am x1
- Saturday mornings should also be included x1

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

Monday	21 (91.3%)
Tuesday	21 (91.3%)
Wednesday	19 (82.6%)
Thursday	22 (95.7%)
Friday	17 (73.9%)