



Report of the Head of Democratic Services

Democratic Services Committee – 7 November 2022

Timing of Council Meetings - Survey

Purpose:	To discuss the Timing of Council Meetings – Survey prior to it being circulated to Councillors later in 2022.
Policy Framework:	None.
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The Timing of Council Meetings Survey be agreed.
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Legal Officer:	Tracey Meredith
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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 2022, the Head of Democratic Services chose to delay the Timing of Meetings survey until late 2022 / early 2023 to allow those newly elected Councillors time to understand the requirements of being a Councillor and its time commitment. The Head of Democratic Services plans to conduct the survey later in 2022.

2. Councillor Timing of Council Meetings Survey

- 2.1 The Councillors Timing of Council Meetings Survey seeks agreement for meeting to 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. 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.

- 2.2 Issues to be considered in conducting a survey could include:
- i) Whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred.
 - ii) Whether times cause difficulties for Councillors with characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, having caring responsibilities or being in employment.
- 2.3 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 the time. Any such arrangements will, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public.
- 2.4 The questions used in the 2017 survey are set out in **Appendix B**.
- 2.5 The Committee is asked to consider the questions to assist with the creation of the 2022 survey.
- 2.6 The outcomes of the survey will be considered by the Democratic Services Committee in due course and a recommendation made to Council.

3. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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'.

3.3 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.

3.4 An IIA screening has been undertaken and no adverse implications have been noted.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 Any financial implications will be funded within existing budget.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 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 - 2017

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 several 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 considered in conducting a survey could include:
- Whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred.
 - Whether times cause difficulties for councillors with 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 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

1. Do you prefer Morning, Afternoon, Evening, or meetings at any time? (*xx Responses*)

Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Anytime

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

Morning (*xx Responses*)

08.00	09.00	10.00	Other (Give Time)

Afternoon (*xx Responses*)

14.00	15.00	16.00	Other (Give Time)

Evening (*xx Responses*)

17.00	17.30	18.00	Other (Give Time)

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

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

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

Morning (*xx Responses*)

08.00	09.00	10.00	Other (Give Time)

Afternoon (*xx Responses*)

14.00	15.00	16.00	Other (Give Time)

Evening (*xx Responses*)

17.00	17.30	18.00	Other (Give Time)

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

Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	