

CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Democratic Services Committee

Date: 24 March 2023

Title: Report in relation to the Members' survey undertaken in relation to the timing of meetings of the Council and its Committees and an evaluation of Members' training.

Purpose of report: To consider the findings of the Members' survey undertaken in relation to the timing of meetings of the Council and an evaluation of Members' training.

Introduction

Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure requires the Council to have regard to the Statutory Guidance in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings are held. The relevant meetings in the context of the guidance are meetings of the full Council and the Committees.

The Statutory Guidance

The Statutory Guidance reads as follows:

Reviewing existing arrangements

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.

2022/23 Survey

The Democratic Services Committee agreed at its meeting in December 2022 to undertake a Members' survey in relation to the timing of meetings and to ask Members about the recent Induction programme. The full findings of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

25 Members responded to the survey (66% of all Members).

The main survey conclusions are as follows:

Timing of meetings

- Of those that responded, 96% stated that they are able to attend on Thursdays, 84% on Tuesdays, 80% on Wednesday, 68% on Fridays and 60% on Mondays;*

- 5 of the respondents listed Monday as their preferred date, with 8 listing Monday as their least preferred date; 13 listed Tuesday as their preferred date, with 2 listing Tuesday as their least preferred date; 11 listed Wednesday as their preferred date with 2 listing Wednesday as their least preferred date; 13 listed Thursday as their least preferred date with 0 listing Thursday as their least preferred date; and 4 listed Friday as their preferred date with 11 listing Friday as their least preferred date (note, several Members selected more than 1 day as a preferred date, and some left several days blank);
- 52% of the respondents stated that they would prefer Council meetings to start at 10.00am; 32% stated that they would prefer to start at 9.30am;
- 52% of the respondents stated that they would prefer Committee meetings to start at 10.00am; 32% stated that they would prefer to start at 9.30am;

Comments

Members commented that the reasons for their preferences included childcare and caring responsibilities, work and self-employment, responsibilities within their Wards, and other meetings which are generally held on Mondays and Friday. Whilst some preferred an earlier, the majority preferred a 10am start to allow for travelling time.

It is therefore proposed that:

- Meetings should continue to be mainly held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays;
- The main commencement times remain at 10.00am for Council and Committees.

Recommendations: The Committee to consider the findings of the 2022/23 Members’ Survey in relation to their preferences for the date and the timing of meetings;

Appendices: Appendix A – The findings of the 2022/23 Members’ Survey

Background documents: Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

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