

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: 20th April 2023

Title: Members' survey in relation to the timing of meetings of the Council and its Committees

Purpose of the report: To consider the Members' survey undertaken in relation to the timing of meetings of the Council and its Committees

For: Decision

Cabinet Portfolio and Cabinet Member: Councillor Bryan Davies
Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Member for Democratic Services, Policy, Performance and People and Organisation

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.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Democratic Services Committee considered the results of the consultation at its meeting on 24th March 2023 and agreed to recommend to Council that:

- Meetings should continue to be mainly held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays;
- The commencement time for Council and Committees to be 10.00am;
- That afternoon meetings, workshops and training events commence at 1.30pm.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? Not required – not a service change.
If, not, please state why

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Summary:

Long term:	N/A
Integration:	N/A
Collaboration:	N/A
Involvement:	N/A
Prevention:	N/A

Recommendation(s): The Council is recommended to approve the following:
1. That meetings are mainly held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays

2. That all meetings of Council and Committees commence at 10.00am
3. That afternoon meetings, workshops and training events commence at 1.30pm.

Reasons for decision: To approve the recommendations resulting from the Survey of timings of meetings, as required by legislation.

Overview and Scrutiny: N/A

Policy Framework: Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Corporate Priorities: N/A

Financial and Procurement implications: None

Legal Implications: None

Staffing implications: None

Property / asset implications: None

Risk(s): None

Statutory Powers: The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Background Papers: The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report dated February 2022.

Appendices: Appendix A – The findings fo the 2022/23 Members' Survey

Corporate Lead Officer: Lowri Edwards
Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services (Head of Democratic Services)

Reporting Officer: Lowri Edwards

Date: 27th March 2023