

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 1 st March 2016
Report Subject	Timing of Council Meetings
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's schedule of meetings is set at the annual meeting and has meetings held in the morning and in the afternoon in a ten week cycle. Recent suggestions from members have prompted a more detailed consideration of when we hold meetings. It is recognised that the established approach of morning and afternoon meetings may make attendance difficult for those members who work and or have caring responsibilities.

Following consideration of this issue at its meeting on 27th January 2016, the Democratic Services Committee has recommended that the Council should consider whether it should hold its meetings at 5.00 p.m. during the next municipal year.

To establish Members' views on when we hold committee meetings a survey is being carried out to enable preferences to be expressed. This will be reported back to the Democratic Services Committee on 27th April 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Council approves holding its meetings at 5.00 p.m. during the next municipal year.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE RECOMMENDATION FROM THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
1.01	At the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee which was held on 27 th January 2016, a report by the Member Engagement Manager, <i>Schedule of Meetings for 2016/17</i> was submitted.
1.02	In that report, it was explained that it has been Flintshire practice to produce a schedule of meetings for the ensuing municipal year for consideration by Council at the Annual Meeting. The draft schedule, which is based on a 10 week committee cycle, is consulted on extensively, with the Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Chairs, the Chief Officer Team and other key officers. However, it was acknowledged that we have not previously afforded the wider membership of the Council the opportunity to comment until the schedule is considered by Council.
1.03	Recently, some Members have asked that the Council consider scheduling its meetings on a mixture of morning, afternoon and evening slots, to make it easier for those with work or caring responsibility to come to meetings. Following initial soundings, it became apparent that for such consultation to be on a meaningful basis, we should also include the possibility of our holding late afternoon or 'twilight' meetings, starting at 5.00 p.m. This should assist those Members who work and be more family friendly for those with caring responsibilities (afternoon meetings clash with picking up children from school, collecting family members from day centres, etc).
1.04	Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 empowers the Welsh Ministers to issue guidance about the timing of meetings with a view to introducing more flexible arrangements to accommodate councillors from more diverse backgrounds. Whilst the Ministers have not yet issued such guidance, it is recognised as being good practice within the Welsh Local Government Association Member Development charter (which Flintshire has been awarded) that Authorities should consult members on when meetings are held.
1.05	In the first instance, the Committee was asked to consider whether there was merit in having a broader span of meeting slots, by including late afternoon and/or evening slots.
1.06	Secondly, it was suggested that a survey of Members could be conducted, using software such as Survey Monkey for the 66 out of the 70 members who use Ipads. The other four members would receive a paper copy. This would enable Members to express their preferences. The results of the survey would be reported to the next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee on 27 th April 2016.
1.07	The report to the Democratic Services Committee also explained that if, following the survey and its consideration by the Democratic services Committee there was agreement to making changes, this could be

	reflected in the report which is submitted to the Annual Meeting which is to be held on 10 th May 2016.
1.08	<p>Following detailed consideration of the report, the Democratic Services Committee passed two resolutions:</p> <p>(a) That the Committee recommends to the County Council that it holds its meetings at 5.00 p.m. during the next municipal year; and</p> <p>(b) That officers be tasked with carrying out a survey amongst Members to enable them to express their preferences for changing when meetings of the Council are held.</p> <p>The survey referred to above in paragraph 1.06 and 1.08 (b) has already commenced. The Council is requested to consider whether it should hold its meetings at 5.00 p.m. during the next municipal year.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The Authority has already adopted a flexible working policy for its staff. If a decision was made to hold more evening meetings, this may require more flexibility for those staff involved and may also necessitate revision of day time office cover levels.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Publication of this report is part of the consultation on this issue.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Greater flexibility in when we hold our meetings should remove barriers for those Members who work full time/shifts or have caring responsibilities and ultimately may encourage a more diverse range of candidates to stand for election.
4.02	Any change may lead to an impact on employees who are expected to attend Council meetings in the evenings etc and who have their own caring responsibilities.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>(1) Democratic Services Committee minutes 27th January 2016, (2) Report by the Member Engagement Manager, <i>Schedule of Meetings for 2016/17</i>. Democratic services committee 27th January 2016</p> <p>Contact Officer: Robert Robins, Member Engagement Manager Telephone: (01352) 702320 E-mail: Robert.robins@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA): body which represents the interest of the 22 local authorities in Wales, together with the three National Park Authorities and the three Fire & Rescue Authorities.</p> <p>WLGA Member Development Charter: accreditation for good practice.</p> <p>Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (LG(W)M 2011): A Measure is a piece of law made by the Welsh Assembly. It has similar effect to an Act of Parliament. The Assembly is able to pass Measures on any 'matter' listed in Schedule 5 to the 2006 Act. After 2011, the Assembly has produced 'Acts' rather than 'Measures', with each having the same legislative weight.</p> <p>Slots: spaces in the schedule of meetings used for holding meetings.</p>