## CONSTITUTION & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

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| **Date of Meeting** | Thursday 12th January 2023 |
| **Report Subject** | Timings of meetings and meeting format survey |
| **Report Author** | Democratic Services Manager |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey of Members was undertaken in November and December 2022 to gauge views on both the schedule and timings of council meetings, and also the format of meetings.

The content of the survey was agreed at the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee meeting in November 2022. A copy of the survey is included as Appendix 1.

The survey sought the views of both elected and co-opted Members about

1. whether meeting arrangements should remain as they are currently, or whether to change timings to include evening meetings; and,
2. the preferred format of meetings: i.e. hybrid or remote.

33 survey responses were received.

In summary, from the responses, there does not seem to be a desire to alter the schedule or timing of meetings.

However, the responses received did indicate that Members' preference is for meetings to be offered as 'hybrid' format.

| RECOMMENDATIONS | |
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| 1 | That the Committee agrees to recommend to Full Council that meeting arrangements in relation to the times when meetings are held remain as they are now. |
| 2 | That a working group, formed from Members of this Committee, meets to review and update the 'interim Multi-Location Meeting Policy', considering the views expressed by Members through the responses to the survey. |
| 3 | That the working group, formed from Members of this Committee, considers the full impact and implications of any changes to the interim Multi-Location Meeting Policy in considering the views expressed by Members through the responses to the survey. |
| 4 | That the working group (if agreed) reports back to this Committee in March with recommendations on 2 and 3. |

## REPORT DETAILS

| 1.00 | **EXPLAINING THE FINDINGS FROM THE TIMINGS OF MEETINGS AND MEETING FORMAT SURVEY** |
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| | *Timings of Meetings* |
| 1.01 | The current schedule and timings of council meetings was agreed at the Council's Annual Meeting on 24th May 2022, and was based on the previous Council's meeting schedule. |
| 1.02 | It was recognised that the after the May 2022 elections, the 'new' Council should make its own decision about when meetings should be held. A survey of Members took place during November and December 2022. |
| 1.03 | Based on the responses to the survey, there does not appear to be a desire to change the current scheduling of meetings. |
| 1.04 | The majority of respondents felt that the current schedule worked well, and allowed Members to undertake other responsibilities and duties during the evenings, including those Members who are also Community and Town Councillors. |
| 1.05 | It is therefore suggested that the current schedule be used to plan for the next civic year of meetings, and reviewed again at the appropriate time should the Committee deem it necessary to do so. |
| | *Meeting Format* |
| 1.06 | The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 was given Royal Assent at the end of January 2022. Section 47 of the Act, and part 1 of schedule 4 of that Act provides the statutory basis for what is now being referred to as 'multi-location meetings'. |
| | Multi-location meetings are defined in the Act as a meeting of a relevant authority whose participants are not all in the same physical place. |
| | Entirely physical meetings are not permitted by the legislation: meetings must be livestreamed and allow attendance by remote means. |
| 1.07 | The Act requires the Council to develop and publish a Multi-Location Meeting Policy. |
| | An interim policy was agreed at the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee meeting in November 2021. |
| 1.08 | In summary, the interim policy (November 2021) suggested that: |
| | • The Annual Meeting of Council, to be held as a hybrid, with Members attending remotely if they wish. |
| | • Ordinary Council meetings will be predominantly remote, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Special Council meetings: will take place by remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Cabinet: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for |

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| | a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Overview & Scrutiny Committees: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Governance & Audit Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Constitution & Democratic Services Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Planning Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Licensing Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Standards: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| | • Licensing sub-committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. |
| 1.09 | At the meeting in 2021, the Committee decided that the interim policy would be in place until the new Council was consulted after the May 2022 elections. |
| | It was recognised that following the 2022 election that the new Council should make its own decision about when meetings should be held and what format they would prefer them to take. |
| | As noted above, survey of Members took place during November and December 2022 to better understand their views following a period of settling in to ensure that new Members could base any responses on their experience. |
| 1.10 | Since the election in May 2022, there has been some divergence away from elements of this interim-policy, including: |
| | • The Annual Meeting in May was held in hybrid format. |
| | • Ordinary Council Meetings have all been held in hybrid format. |
| | • Overview & Scrutiny Committees have all been held in hybrid format. |
| 1.11 | Making these changes without updating the policy means that a review is now overdue. |
| | The results of the survey will help to inform the review and can be used to draw up a permanent policy document. |
| 1.12 | Of those that responded to the survey, there is a clear preference expressed |

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| | for formal council meetings to be delivered as 'hybrid' format.<br><br>There were two main reasons given for preferring hybrid format for meetings:<br><br>1. Being able to have social interaction with other Members (*".. it helps with the mental health of Members when meeting face-to-face"*); and,<br><br>2. Being able to speak directly to Officers presenting a report (*".. it makes it easier to ask questions to the Officers"*).<br><br>Members also suggested that problems with their IT meant they were more comfortable attending meetings in person (hybrid).<br><br>There were several arguments in favour of Planning Committee meetings better lending themselves to hybrid format as it was felt this would allow and encourage greater public participation.<br><br>Others suggested those Committees which had Co-opted Members may work better if hybrid was an option. |
| 1.13 | Yet amongst the same respondents there is also recognition of the benefit of being able to access meetings remotely, including: "*They cut down time travelling and travelling costs..*" and "*..it is convenient and easier to attend for those of us who work..*".<br><br>Remote attendance can also help with Members work life balance, and make meetings more accessible for those current or future Members with caring responsibilities.<br><br>Levels of attendance in person at meetings has varied since the elections. Full Council meetings show high levels of in person attendance whilst physical presence is low for most Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings – see Appendix 2 for details of physical presence at meetings. |
| 1.14 | Clearly there are pros and cons to both remote and hybrid formats of meetings. Some of these relate to cost and resource; some to environmental factors. Personal preference/circumstance will also play a role and it would be surprising if everyone agreed on the same approach for every meeting. |
| 1.15 | Delivering 'hybrid' meetings rather than just remote requires higher levels of resourcing. It involves using a physical location such as County Hall. The comparable resource levels are illustrated in Section 2 below. |
| 1.16 | Hosting hybrid meetings will also result in higher carbon emissions due to those attending in-person likely travelling via car. |
| 1.17 | There is also the human side of things, with a majority of respondents indicating that they felt that having the option to attend a meeting in person (i.e. hybrid format) helped with mental well-being. |
| 1.18 | This is a complex matter to resolve.<br><br>All of the results from the survey will need to be fully analysed and carefully considered.<br><br>A 'cost-benefit' analysis should be part of this process, taking account the views of the respondents. The focus of which should not simply be about |

| | | financial costs, but also take account of any environmental considerations. |
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| | | There may also the implications for Democratic Services who are tasked with hosting and facilitating meetings. It is a very small service that serves all of the formal meetings, but also has other duties to fulfil. |
| 1.19 | | A working group made up of Members from this committee could be formed to properly consider all options that would then feed into the drafting of a permanent Multi-Location Meeting Policy that could be recommended to Council for adoption. |

| 2.00 | RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS |
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| 2.01 | The holding of evening meetings would increase costs as it would be necessary to keep County Hall, or other buildings where formal meetings are held open later than the current 7pm close. |

Hybrid meetings (rather than wholly remote meetings) are also more demanding of resource from the Democratic Services team who must operate both the Zoom meeting and the webcasting equipment as well as taking minutes.

| Resource (assuming 2 hour meeting) | Hybrid | Remote |
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| Officers operating IT equipment | 2 | 1 |
| Facilitator | 1 | 1 |
| Officers hosting meeting Travel time to County Hall | 3 | 0 |
| Room set-up | Yes | No |
| Room clear-up | Yes | No |
| Officers hosting meeting Travel time from County Hall | 3 | 0 |

The overall length of time to host a hybrid meeting by Officers is significantly longer.

| Resource (assuming 2 hour meeting) | Hybrid | Remote |
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| Officers hosting meeting Travel time to County Hall | 60 mins | 0 |
| Facilitator Travel time to County Hall | 30 mins | 0 |
| Room set-up | 60 mins | 0 |
| Hybrid test | 90 mins | 0 |
| Meeting | 360 mins | 240 mins |
| Room clear-up | 60 mins | No |
| Officers hosting meeting Travel time from County Hall | 3 | 0 |

| 3.00 | CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT |
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| 3.01 | Members were asked to complete a survey about the schedule and timing of meetings and to provide a view on the format of meetings. The responses form the basis of this report.<br><br>A copy is included as Appendix 1. |

| 4.00 | RISK MANAGEMENT |
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| 4.01 | Holding meetings in the evening may cause problems to Members because of clashes with community and town council meetings and other community-based responsibilities as well as home life. |

| 5.00 | APPENDICES |
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| 5.01 | Appendix 1 – Survey Meeting Times and Format |

| 6.00 | LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS |
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| 6.01 | • Report to Constitution & Democratic Services Committee meeting held 17th November 2021 regarding Multi- location and Future Meetings Policy<br><br>• Minutes from Constitution & Democratic Services Committee meeting held 17th November 2021, agreed on 26th January 2022<br><br>**Contact Officer:** Steven Goodrum, Head of Democratic Services<br>**Telephone:** 01352 702320<br>**E-mail:** Steven.Goodrum@flintshire.gov |

| 7.00 | GLOSSARY OF TERMS |
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| 7.01 | **Remote attendance Meetings** – where all participants and observers are connected by a software platform. No one is 'physically 'present at the meeting.<br><br>**Multi-location Meetings** – the term now widely used to describe both remote attendance meetings and hybrid meetings.<br><br>**Hybrid Meetings** - where some people are physically present, but others contribute remotely. |