

Meeting of:	Democratic Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 14 November 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 – Timing of Council Meetings
Purpose of Report:	To approve a Survey for seeking Members' views on the timing, length and frequency of meetings of Full Council and any Committee or Sub-Committee of the Council
Report Owner:	J. Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	J. Rees, Head of Democratic Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Director of Corporate Resources Head of Legal and Democratic Services / Monitoring Officer
Policy Framework:	Any decision to generally alter arrangements in regard to the timing of Council meetings is a matter for Full Council.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Government has previously issued Statutory Guidance under Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("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 Guidance states that the times at which the meetings of a Council take place is of considerable significance as it can affect the extent to which individuals may contemplate standing for election. • The Statutory Guidance issued in relation to the Measure, includes guidance on this Section and the Guidance is reproduced at Appendix 1 to the report. • Paragraph 1.9 of the Statutory Guidance makes the point that Local Authorities do not continue to hold their meetings at the same time they have done out of inertia and the Survey will be circulated to all Members of the Council, what current arrangements suited the previous generation of Councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the new intake of Members. • Revised Statutory Guidance in relation to the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 has been previously consulted on. The final Guidance is still awaited, however it remains largely unchanged. 	

- A suggested draft Survey for consideration and agreement by the Committee, is attached at Appendix 2. Subject to approval of the Survey, with the results being reported to the Democratic Services Committee on 13th February, 2023 and the Council Meeting on 6th March, 2023, depending on the outcome of the Survey.

Recommendation

1. That the Committee considers and approves the suggested draft Survey.

Reason for Recommendation

1. In order to comply with the requirements of Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

1. Background

- 1.1 Welsh Government has previously issued Statutory Guidance under Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (“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.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Guidance states that the times at which the meetings of a Council take place is of considerable significance as it can affect the extent to which individuals may contemplate standing for election. It further states that this is an area for concern as it may impact on the diversity of membership of the Council and thus impact on the Council’s ability to make decisions which are informed by and reflect the diversity of people living in the Council area. Whilst the requirement to provide the facility for multi-location meetings for Members who wish to join meetings remotely (as required under section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021) should overcome some concerns, many people will find attending, sometimes lengthy meetings, in the day is incompatible with their paid employment and certain times of day are challenging for people with caring responsibilities such as young children. The Statutory Guidance issued in relation to the Measure includes guidance on this Section and the Guidance is reproduced at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2.2 Paragraph 1.9 of the Statutory Guidance makes the point that Local Authorities do not continue to hold their meetings the same time they have done out of inertia and what current arrangements suited the previous generation of Councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the new intake of Members.
- 2.3 In addition, draft Statutory Guidance in relation to the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 has been previously consulted on. The final Guidance is still awaited, however, it remains largely unchanged when compared to the 2011 Guidance with the exception of seeking views on the frequency and length of meetings. In essence, it states that:
 - All Councils should review the times at which meetings are held at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new Council is elected, but no later

than six months after an election. It is then a matter for the Authority to determine the regularity of such surveys;

- Issues to be taken into account in conducting a survey should include :
 - (i) Whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred;
 - (ii) Whether meetings are to be multi-location; *
 - (iii) The preferred meeting length;
 - (iv) Whether particular times cause difficulties for Councillors with particular characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, having caring responsibilities or being in employment.

* (The Council approved its Multi-Locations Meeting Policy in April, 2022.)

- 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, having regard to equality and diversity issues;
- The Council should be prepared to make changes to its pattern of working if it meant that the Council was better able to retain new Councillors with outside responsibilities;
- Councils should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of pleasing all of their Members all of the time.

- 2.4** A suggested Survey for consideration and agreement by the Committee, is attached at Appendix 2, please note the Survey will be an online survey with a link emailed to Members. Subject to approval of the Survey, it is further suggested that the Survey is then conducted, with the results being reported to Democratic Services Committee on 13th February, 2023 and the Council Meeting on 6th March, 2023 depending on the outcome of the Survey. The opportunity to canvas Members' views on the timing of Briefings / Seminars and Training has also been taken as part of the Survey.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Annual Delivery Plan, as Councillors are a voice for their communities that they serve.
- 3.2** Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for a more diverse democracy across the Vale of Glamorgan links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.
- 3.3** Identifying and overcoming potential barriers that may prevent Members fully participating in democratic processes is crucial to ensure the Council achieves a diverse culture. Failure to address potential barriers may dissuade the public standing as a candidate at future elections.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

4.1 There are no specific implications associated with this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

5.1 There are no specific implications associated with this report.

Employment

5.2 There are no specific implications associated with this report/

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.3 Due consideration should be given to those in employment and those with caring responsibilities.

5.4 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales has determined that all Councils as a minimum support Members by contributing towards the Costs of Care and personal assistance where a member has primary caring responsibilities for a child or adult and / or personal support needs where these are not covered by statutory or other provision.

6. Background Papers

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

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/4/contents>

Chapter 1 Timing Of Council Meetings

Statutory Guidance made under Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Introduction

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 a number of 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.

What the Measure requires

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.

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 legislation¹ 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.

¹ Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (1996 c18)

Dear Councillor,

TIMING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Welsh Government is encouraging Local Authorities to consider more flexible arrangements aimed at making local government service more attractive to a more diverse cross-section of the adult population.

Welsh Government's view is that "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." The Welsh Government has issued statutory guidance on this issue and Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 states that a Local Authority must have regard to this Guidance. The Guidance states that:

- All Councils 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 Council should be prepared to make changes to its pattern of working if it meant that the Council was better able to retain new Councillors with outside responsibilities.
- Councils should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of pleasing all of their Members all of the time.

The Council currently holds the majority of its meeting in the evening commencing at 6 p.m. There are a minority of Committee meetings that are held at 10 a.m., 2 p.m., 4 p.m. and 5 p.m.

VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

Timing of Meetings Survey 2022

Name of Councillor:

1. Do you find the arrangements for the current cycle/timetable of meetings satisfactory? *(Please indicate with a tick in the relevant box below.)*

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

To help understand your response more clearly please provide any additional information.

2. Is there a day of the week that you would find it difficult to attend meetings? *(Please indicate with a tick in the relevant box or boxes below.)*

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	I have no difficulty attending weekday meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have indicated above (question 2) difficulties in attendance on certain days can you please provide any additional information that could contribute to helping us to understand your response more clearly.

3. Please indicate your preference in relation to the timings of meetings by placing a tick in the relevant boxes below (*please only indicate preference on meetings you attend*).

Meeting	10.00am	2.00pm	4.00pm	6.00pm	Other time (<i>please specify</i>)
Council					
Cabinet					
Scrutiny					
Licensing					
Planning					
Governance and Audit					
Community Liaison					
Standards					
Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison					
All other Committees					
Seminars/Training					

Please provide any additional information that could contribute to helping us to understand your response more clearly (*e.g. age, gender, religion, work, family OR caring commitments*), together with any other comments about the timing of meetings.

4. The Statutory Guidance states that:

“Councils should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to the impossibility of pleasing all of their Members all the time”.

Would varying or rotating the start times of meetings you are involved in, assist you with your attendance at those meetings? (For example, if meetings were to begin at either 10 a.m. or 6 p.m. alternating on a monthly basis.)

(Please indicate with a tick in the relevant box below.)

Yes	No

To help us understand your response more clearly why varying / rotating meeting start times either would OR would not be helpful, please provide any additional information i.e. which meetings would be appropriate to vary / rotate?

5. Do you consider that meetings should have a set meeting length? *(Please indicate your preference with a tick in the relevant box below.)*

Meeting	No limit	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	Other
Council					
Cabinet					
Scrutiny					
Licensing					
Planning					
Governance and Audit					
Community Liaison					
Standards					
Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison					

All other Committees					
Seminars/Training					

If you have stated Other, it would be appreciated if you could provide any additional information to help us understand your response more clearly.

5. Please provide, if you wish, any further comments regarding timing, duration and frequency of meetings / seminars / training below:

Please note this survey will be an online survey with a link provided to Members in an email