

Meeting of:	<b>Democratic Services Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Monday, 13 February 2023</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 – Timings of Council Meetings
Purpose of Report:	To provide the outcome of the Councillors’ Survey on Timing of Council Meetings.
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 and Head of Legal and Democratic Services/ Monitoring Officer
Policy Framework:	Any decision to alter arrangements in regard to the timings of Council meetings is a matter for Full Council.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• The draft survey questions were agreed by the Committee at its meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2022, with the survey being conducted between 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2022 and 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2023.</li> </ul>	

## Recommendation

1. That the findings as contained within this report and as attached at Appendix 2 to the report in relation to the Timing of Council Meetings Survey be considered.

## Reasons for Recommendations

1. For the Committees consideration.

### 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.
- 1.2 The Statutory Guidance issued in relation to the Measure, is reproduced at Appendix 1 to the report.

### 2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The draft Survey questions were agreed by the Committee at its meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2022, with the Survey being conducted between 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2022 and 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2023.
- 2.2 The Survey was conducted via a Microsoft Teams online questionnaire and a copy of the Survey and results are attached at Appendix 2 to this report. 22 of the Authority’s 54 Councillors (41%) completed the Survey.
- 2.3 As the comments on the forms were completed anonymously when reproduced some of the Members can be identified from comments made. The Chair of the Democratic Services Committee has therefore requested that a precis of the comments be presented in the Appendix as opposed to the full text.
- 2.4 Below are some key aspects of the Questionnaire and the responses received -

**Question 2** Do you find the arrangements for the current cycle/timetable of meetings satisfactory? - **91% (20) of responses have advised Yes with 9% (2) stating No**

**Question 3** Is there a day of the week that you would find it difficult to attend meetings? **The Majority of the 19 responses received to this question advised that they considered the current timetable worked well.**

**Question 6** Please indicate your preference in relation to the timings of meetings by placing a tick in the relevant boxes below: **The responses received are as below:-**

Meeting	10.00am	2.00pm	4.00pm	6.00pm	Other time ( <i>please specify</i> )
Council	2	2	3	14*	0
Cabinet	3	8*	4	5	2
Scrutiny	2	2	4	13*	1
Licensing	11*	1	2	6	2
Planning	2	2	7	9*	2
Governance and Audit	2	2	4	12*	2
Community Liaison	2	1	4	13*	2
Standards	6	1	4	9*	2
Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison	2	3	4	11*	2
All other Committees	2	2	3	12*	3
Seminars/Training	3	3	4	9*	3

**NB. \* As can be seen from the above the preferred time for meetings to take place can be noted as 6.00pm.**

**Question 8.** 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.) **82% of respondents said no with 18% saying yes.**

**Question 10.** Do you consider that meetings should have a set meeting length? **See number of responses for each Committee below -**

Meeting	No limit	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	Other
Council	3	5	3	6	3
Cabinet	3	5	5	2	3
Scrutiny	3	7	6	3	3
Licensing	4	4	7	2	4
Planning	4	5	5	5	4
Governance and Audit	4	6	8	0	4
Community Liaison	2	8	8	1	3
Standards	5	6	7	0	4
Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison	2	9	7	0	4

All other Committees	3	9	6	1	4
Seminars/Training	2	11	3	1	5

As can be seen from the responses above over 50% of the Members that completed the survey considered a preferred set length of time for training should be 2 hours with Committee meeting length times being considered to be 2 or 3 hours by the majority of respondents.

**Question 13.** Please indicate your preference in relation to which format of meetings of the Council should be held by placing a tick in the relevant box. **See responses below-**

Meeting	Hybrid (Combination of In Person and Remote)	Remote (No In Person attendance)
Council *	20	2
Annual Meeting	18	4
Cabinet *	19	3
Scrutiny	19	3
Licensing	16	6
Planning *	17	5
Public Rights of Way	16	6
Governance and Audit	18	4
Community Liaison	15	7
Democratic Services	15	7
Early Retirement / Redundancy	17	5
Investigating	17	5
Senior Management Appointment	16	6
Standards	18	4
Trust	16	6
Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison	16	6
Welsh Church Act Estate	15	7
Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee	16	6

### **Interpreting the Outcome of the Timing of Council Meetings Survey**

- 2.5** Although comments were received from some Members for daytime meetings the outcome of the Survey indicates that the preferred time to hold the majority of Committee meetings should be 6.00pm, with Cabinet at 2.00pm and Licensing Committee at 10.00am. It being noted that these are the current timings on the Council's calendar of meetings.
- 2.6** Notwithstanding the above the Authority must consider the needs of those Councillors in employment and with caring responsibilities etc. and seek to find a way to ensure that timings of meetings are accessible. A question was therefore

posed with regard to rotating meeting times due and having regard to the impossibility to please all Councillors all of the time. It being noted that any such arrangements would, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public. However, as can be seen from the responses received to Question 8 on Appendix 2 to the report 18 members out of 22 considered that rotating meeting times would not be appropriate for some of the reasons identified in the Appendix.

**2.7** Having regard to the above and the results of the survey at Appendix 2 to the report, Committee may wish to consider that –

- no change is made to the Council’s current timings for meetings
- a set length for training be recommended to be 2 hours as suggested by over 50% of those surveyed
- the timing of Cabinet meetings remain as is ( also recognising that this is a matter for the Leader of the Council )
- having regard to Question 13 ( Hybrid or remote/ in person meetings) the Council’s Multi Location Meetings Policy, that is due for its 12 month review in the next few weeks, be considered to reflect the findings of the survey that all Council meetings be undertaken on a hybrid basis. However, where interviews for positions within the Authority by Committee be deemed to be appropriate to be held in person, the MLM policy be recommended to remain as is.

**2.8** Committee is reminded that the Council’s Calendar of meetings is approved by the Cabinet. However, although Chairs / Committees may at their first meeting seek to amend the times for the remainder of the year and or a Chair can make amendments during the year, as also mentioned in some responses to the survey, it is important to be mindful that this can have knock on problems when Committee times are amended.

### **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 Any changes to existing timing of meeting arrangements may have implications for Officers who attend meetings of the Council.

### **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 1 employment legislation<sup>1</sup> 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.

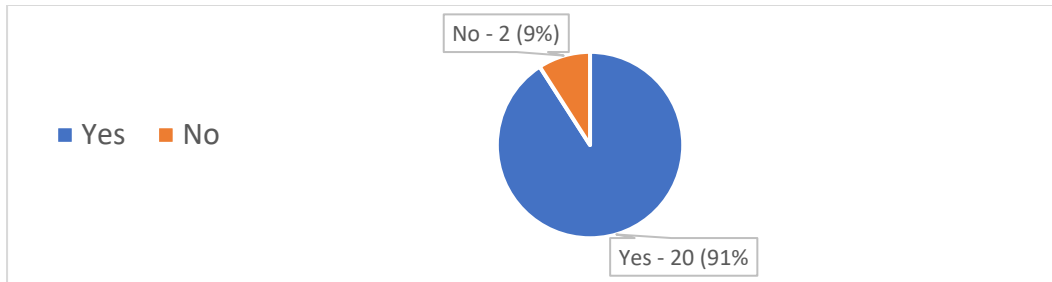
1.13 As a result of the survey, local authorities should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of pleasing all their members all of the time. Any such arrangements will, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public.



**Timing of Meetings Survey 2022 – Responses 22 out of 54 as of 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2023**

**1. Members Name or Anonymous**

**2. Do you find the arrangements for the current cycle / timetable of meetings satisfactory?**

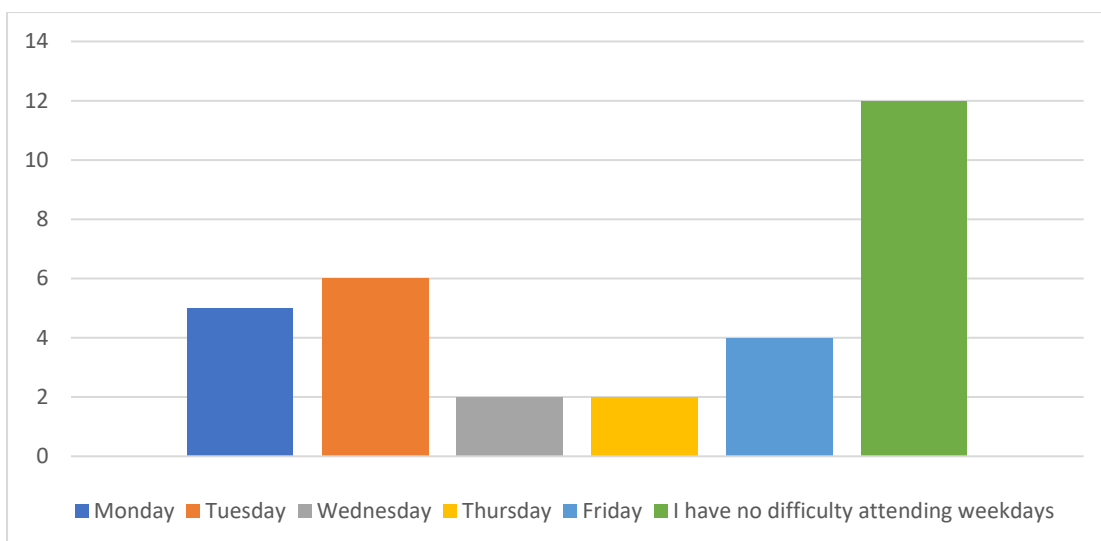


**3. To help understand your response more clearly, please provide additional information**

**19 Responses received -**

The majority of responses stated that they considered the range of times the current timetable provides, works well and some evening meeting were preferred due to work commitments in the day and caring responsibilities.

**4. Is there a day of the week that you would find it difficult to attend meetings?**



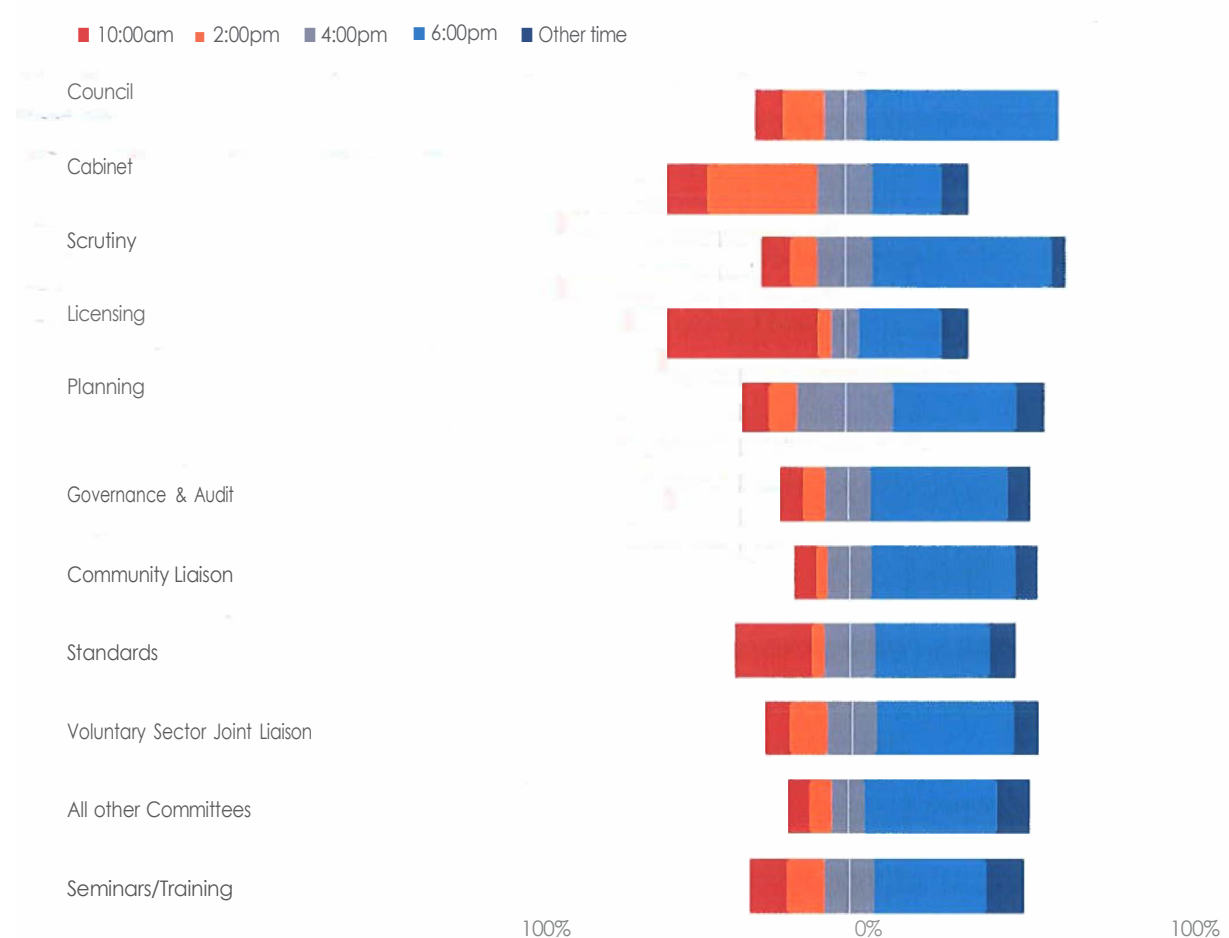
5. If you have indicated above (question 4) difficulties in attendance on certain days can you please provide any additional information that could contribute to helping us to ..

**12 Responses received -**

Most of the Members that responded preferred having a calendar in advance as this was easier to manage. The majority of Members also had different reasons for their commitments on various days.

6. Please indicate your preference in relation to the timings of meeting by placing a tick in the relevant boxes below

**22 Responses received -**



7. Please provide any additional information that could contribute to helping us to understand your response more clearly (e.g. alternative timings, age, gender, religion...

#### 20 Responses received -

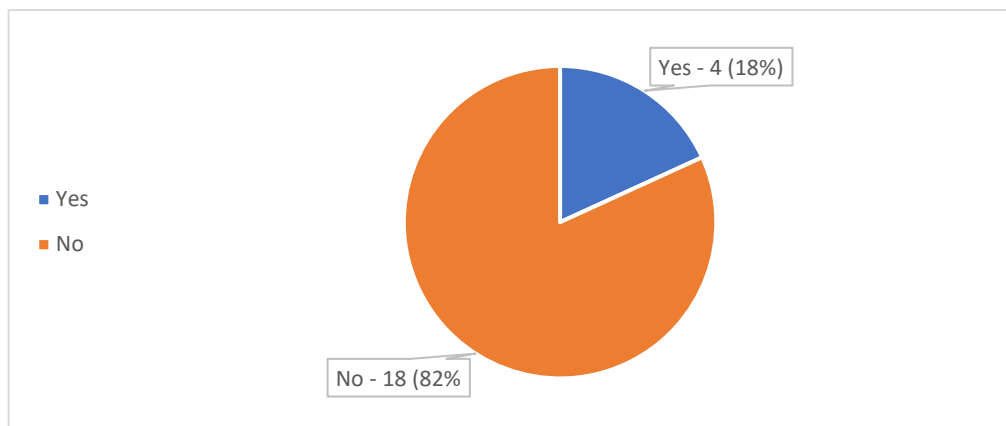
Some Members suggested meetings to start after 4.00 p.m. whereas the majority preferred 6.00 p.m. start. Members were also mindful of other Members' caring responsibilities.

It was suggested by 2 Members that the Committees themselves, particularly Community Liaison Committee and Planning should be asked what time they wished to start.

8. 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 of 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)**



9. 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

Some comments made were as follows:

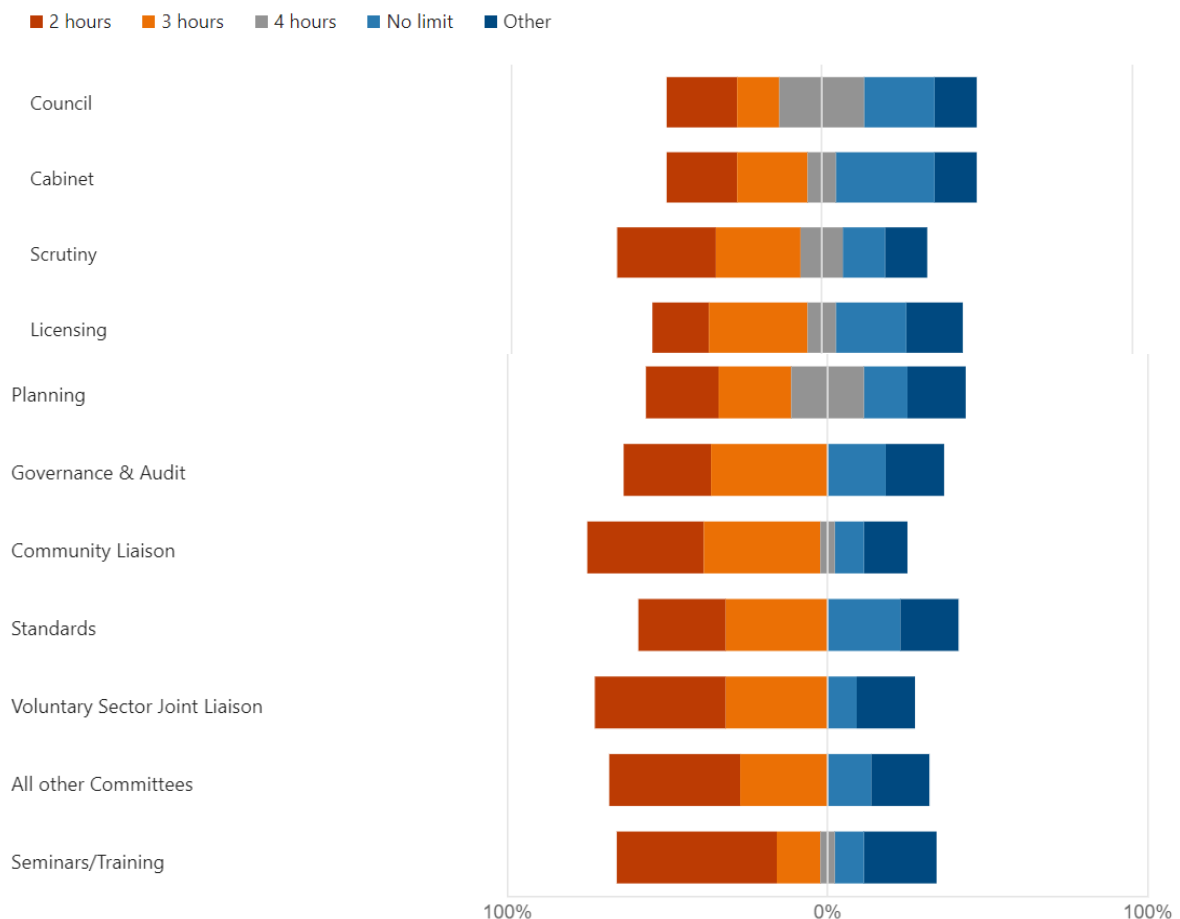
- It would not be helpful as Members with work or caring commitments often select Committee responsibilities with reference to their availability
- Different start times would be a hinderance in terms of organisation. I see no advantage to this.

- Rotating meetings makes it more difficult to know when meetings are especially for the public and should only be considered if rotation of meetings would help a significant number of people
- I would be unable to attend meetings held in the daytime on a regular basis. It is possible as a one off but this cannot be the norm.
- Changing the time can result in confusion
- As I work and have carer responsibilities, a fixed pattern of meeting times enables me to plan ahead more easily.
- None of my meetings would be appropriate to vary or rotate due to my work commitments
- Rotating meetings times would be unacceptable to me as I prefer to have start times set with no rotation which makes diary planning more convenient.
- I am happy with the current arrangements.

## 10. Do you consider that meetings should have a set meeting length?

10. Do you consider that meetings should have a set meeting length?

[More Details](#)



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

**11 Responses received -**

Some comments include:

- Meeting should last no longer than 2 hours in an emergency. If meetings last longer, I would have to question why there is so much on the agenda and should meetings be more frequent?
- I think fixed times are helpful and ensure Councillors are able to plan their attendance for the whole length of the meeting. There are often occasions when Councillors need to leave part-way through and this can weaken debate and decision making. I think it would be helpful for Committee Members to consider priorities they need to achieve and set fixed times accordingly for individual Committees. The issue is more complex for Full Council and it may be helpful to look at this separately e.g. should the number of questions be limited rather than the time being limited to ensure sufficient time for all matters to be debated/discussed.
- 1 hour for training. I struggle with the way training is being delivered. It is very monotonous and with it being delivered remotely, I struggle to maintain my attention.
- I believe that a 3 hour agenda can assist both the Council and Chairs. I feel it would stop people monopolising broadcast meetings as agenda items that are of significance or importance would have to be agendered for a greater time of a separate meeting called specifically for that item. This may encourage people to contribute/compromise/collaborate in the Committee meetings rather than in Full Council.
- Set meeting time limits could be arrange if pre-determined based on agenda items and meaningful consultation beforehand.
- If a meeting is Chaired well, there is no reason for it to be longer than 2 hours.
- You could only set a limit or time constraint if you were able to push some of the agenda items to another day and time. Limits of this nature could lead to rushed and possibly poorly made decision making.
- 1 hour max.

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

**16 Responses received -**

Sample comments received below:

- Breaks should be scheduled into meetings (15 minutes every two hours). To avoid excessively long agendas there should be an opportunity to add extra meetings.

- If longer, a longer period break should be factored in to allow food to be eaten (not provided) as it could have negative effects for some medical conditions (e.g. diabetes).
- Likely duration of meetings should be considered when drawing together the agenda including whether items require resolution on the day/night or can reasonably be discussed at the next scheduled meeting if the meeting is becoming lengthy. Full Council and Quasi-Regulatory Committees may be dealing with time-bound matters which require resolution and therefore longer meetings. Evening seminars and training sessions should be compact and focus on the information being imparted to Members (obviously full/half day sessions are a different kettle of fish).
- It's good how training is available at different times of day.
- I personally think for proper consideration of agendas we should not heed to a time limit, especially as at this time meetings usually only surpass 2 hours for important bona-fide reasons. However, training that lasts too long does negatively impact the benefits of the training so perhaps that is a good idea.
- It would be helpful to set a maximum meeting length which will also help concentration and ensure quality of input.
- Its difficult to comment on timings etc as about if you don't sit on these Committees.
- Seminars/training should be held during office hours (08:30 – 17:00) and NOT in evenings when personal activities and family matters are equally important to some Elected Members at least.
- In terms of training it would be ideal if the training could have a morning/afternoon and evening session (evening sessions starting at 6.00 p.m.) It is also worth thinking about Saturday training for people who work full time.
- Time for Members questions at Full Council should be in line with other Councils in Wales where many allow 30 minutes for questions.
- Just feel that meetings that go on until 9.00 p.m. are very draining. Mentally it is not possible to take everything on board.
- Timings in relation to length of meetings should vary dependent upon the complexity and content of the topic. I would suggest that some of the agendas are an attempt to cram in as much detail as possible when a report provided previously should be sufficient to discuss and decide upon an item. If complex or challenging then suitable breaks must be included.

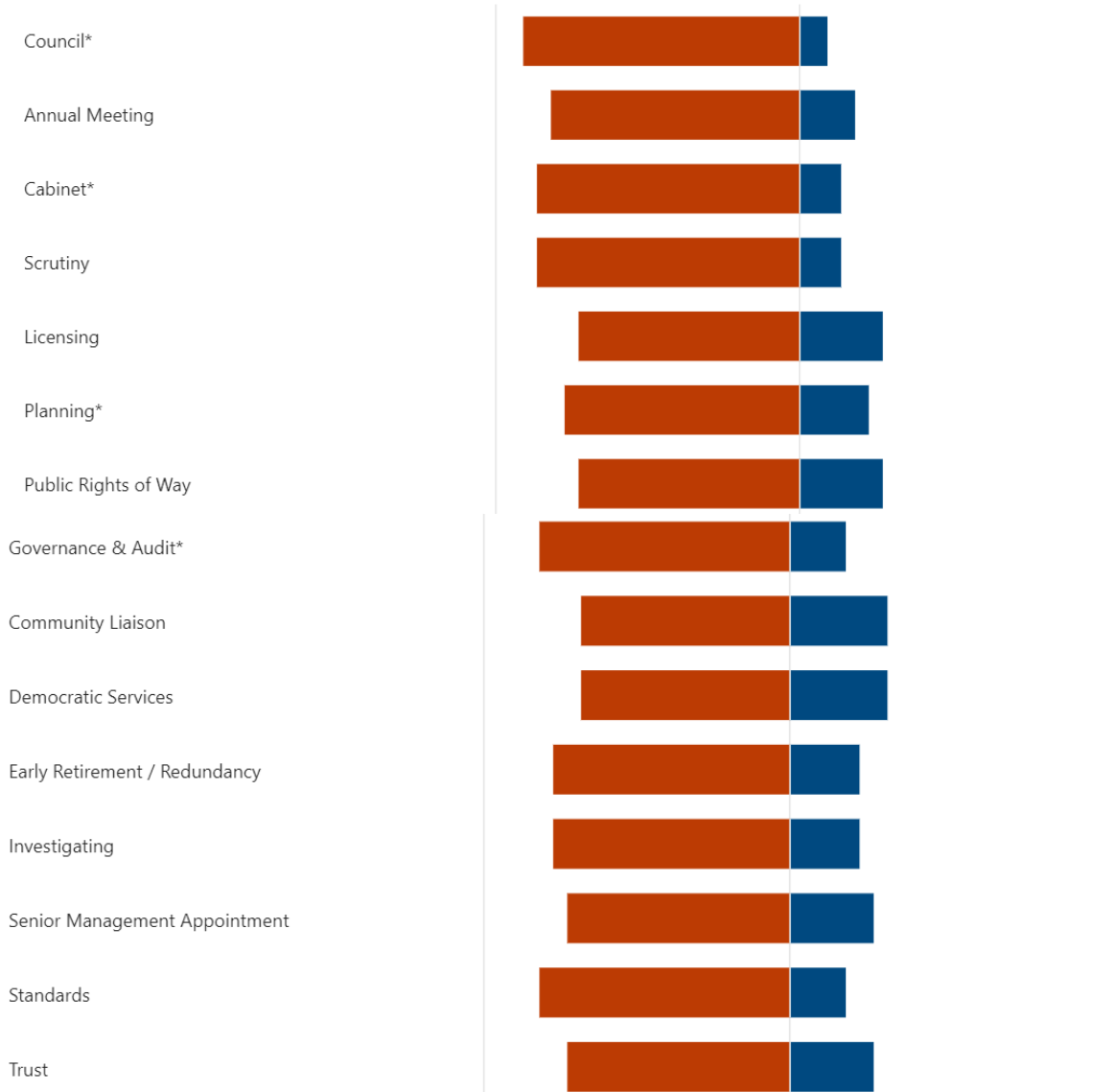
**13. The Council determined when it approved its Multi-Location Meetings (MLM) Policy that these meetings will be held and broadcast on a hybrid basis (excluding meetings that are wholly or in part confidential in nature).**

**The Council when approving the MLM Policy agreed that Committee Meetings such as Senior Management Appointment Committee may be conducted on an 'in person' basis when it conducted interviews due to confidential information being discussed. This principle is extended to Committees such as the Investigating Committee.**

**Please indicate your preference in relation to which format of meetings of the Council should be held by placing a tick in the relevant box below:**

**22 Responses received -**

■ Hybrid (Combination of In Person and Remote) ■ Remote (No In Person attendance)



Governance & Audit\*



Community Liaison



Democratic Services



Early Retirement / Redundancy



Investigating



Senior Management Appointment



Standards



Trust

