

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Times and Venues for Meetings

12 September 2013

Report of Chief Officer (Governance)

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider a request from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the start times and a request from other members of the Committee to alternate venues for their meetings during the remainder of 2013/14.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) **That the Committee consider the requests to change the start times of Overview and Scrutiny Committees from 6pm to 7pm and to alternate the venues between Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls, for the remainder of the 2013/14 municipal year.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Members will be aware that this Committee agrees the annual timetable of Lancaster City Council meetings and any other timetabling issues which may arise.
- 1.2 On 8 November 2012, Council Business Committee agreed that the start time for meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be 6pm and the venue would be Morecambe Town Hall, as in previous years.
- 1.3 At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in July 2013, the Chairman asked about the possibility of changing the start time from 6pm to 7pm and other members of the Committee asked if it would be possible to alternate the venue between Morecambe Town Hall and Lancaster Town Hall. A report has been brought to this meeting to consider both requests.

2.0 Practical Issues

- 2.1 When this Committee sets the timetable for the year ahead, provisional room bookings are confirmed. If a venue is changed mid-year, that can cause difficulties for room hire. However, at the time of drafting this report, rooms would be available at Lancaster Town Hall to hold meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny

Committee on the dates scheduled for the remainder of this year, if required.

- 2.2 With regard to the change in time, there are no Committees which currently have a 7pm start time. Evening meetings commence at 6pm for meetings in Morecambe Town Hall and 6.10pm at Lancaster Town Hall. Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are quite long, usually taking over two hours. In March 2012 the meeting lasted for three hours and forty five minutes. With a start time of 6pm that meeting finished at 9.45pm. If meetings are moved to a start time of 7pm then it may be necessary to defer some items to a later meeting to avoid very late finishes after 10.30pm at night.
- 2.3 With regard to alternating venues, the only meetings which alternate between Morecambe and Lancaster Town Halls are Cabinet meetings. The rationale for this is to make the key decision making meetings more accessible to the public in the district by not restricting the venue to one Town Hall. However, it can cause confusion, with Members or Officers occasionally going to the wrong Town Hall. All committee meetings have a regular venue and are held at either Lancaster Town Hall or Morecambe Town Hall so that there are no complications about whether a meeting is to be held at one or the other.
- 2.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can, and does, hold meetings in venues outside the Town Halls in the Community when looking at particular local issues. For a meeting about Rural Broadband, for example, the Committee met at Hornby Institute; for a meeting about Playgrounds in the district, it met at Ryelands Park. So there is no reason why the Committee could not choose to meet in Lancaster when examining a matter particularly affecting residents and/or services in Lancaster.

3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 Officers have consulted with the members and substitute members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Not all the members responded but the results from those who did are shown at Appendix A. Only one of the Members of the Committee was in favour of changing the start time to 7pm and two of the three were in favour of alternating the venue. If the substitute members' views are included the results are split with three in favour of the later start time of 7pm and three against. Three Members supported the idea of alternating venues and only one expressed a view that this might cause confusion. To summarise, there is more support for alternating venues than for a later start time.

4.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

- 4.1 The options available are:

	Option 1: No change to the time or venue of meetings.	Option 2: To alternate venues but keep the start time to 6.00pm (Morecambe) / 6.10pm (Lancaster).	Option 3: To alternate venues and change to a later start time of 7pm for the remainder of 2013/14.
Advantages	No changes need to be made to the timetable or room bookings and there	Is advantageous to Members who prefer to attend meetings in Lancaster as currently	As option 2 and also advantageous for the Chairman and any other Members who

	can be no confusion over venues with Members or officers going to the wrong Town Hall.	all the meetings are held in Morecambe.	prefer late meetings.
Disadvantages	6pm is an inconvenient start time for the Chairman.	Potential for Members or officers to go to the wrong venue. This shouldn't really be an issue as the venue is clearly printed on the agenda for each meeting.	Meetings are likely to have late finishes. Increased costs. There are staffing, heating and lighting cost implications for keeping the Town Halls open late, particularly for winter meetings. May be more difficult to persuade external contributors to attend a later meeting.
Risks	None identified.	If members or officers go to the wrong venue this can mean that meetings start late or items are not fully debated because members are missing, or that officers are not there to provide information to Members. It poses a risk to the overview and scrutiny work programme.	That items at the end of the agenda might be deferred because of the lateness of the hour. That Members may need to leave before the end of the meeting because of the lateness of the hour. These are risks which might delay progress with the overview and scrutiny work programme or make the Committee less inclusive.

4.2 The officer preferred option is 1. This is the most cost effective and matches the venue arrangements in place for other Committees. Within available budgets, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is still at liberty to choose to hold meetings at venues other than Lancaster Town Hall to encourage residents to attend when examining particular local issues.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Members are asked to consider the request raised by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in light of the information in this report.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

None.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are financial implications for heating and lighting the meeting rooms and staffing the building for meetings continuing beyond 7.30 pm. If this only applies to the five meetings in the remainder of this municipal year, it would not be a significant cost (approx £9 per meeting for staffing assuming meetings would finish one hour later than usual plus costs of heating and lighting) but if the arrangement were to continue into future years it would be a consideration. Start times of 6pm are more cost-effective.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**Human Resources:**

Clerking meetings with a later finish would not present any particular problems. Democratic Services staff supporting meetings are entitled to time off in lieu for any time worked outside of the 7.30pm flexi time cut off point. Staff take time off for any hours accrued clerking a late meeting as soon after the meeting as is convenient for the needs of the service.

Property services staff work longer hours when the building is in use at night.

Information Services:

None.

Property:

None.

Open Spaces:

None.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and her comments have been incorporated into the report.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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Overview and Scrutiny Members and Substitute Members Responses

Councillor responses to the following questions:

1. The Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee has requested that consideration be given to amending the commencement time of the Committee from 6.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m.
2. Other members of the Committee have requested that the venue of the meeting alternate between Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls. Currently the meeting is held at Morecambe Town Hall.

Councillor	Response
Councillor Brookes (Substitute Member)	I have no strong opinions on these suggestions, but a 7pm start would make it easier to eat before attending. I would be dismayed if an LTH/MTH flip flop spread to B&P though.
Councillor Hall (Substitute Member)	As I'm only a substitute, I won't express an opinion, but leave that to the full members.
Councillor Joan Jackson	I prefer the meetings to start at 6pm. I have been given to understand these meetings can last for 3 hours or more which could lead to travelling home at a late time. The City Council evening meetings are all scheduled for 6pm starts which is the time we were aware of when letting our names go forward for the committee. In the interests of fairness alternating the meetings between Morecambe and Lancaster is a good idea and has my support.

<p>Councillor Mace (Substitute Member)</p>	<p>In principle, meeting arrangements should be unchanged once they have been fixed for the following 12 months. This means that change could now be considered for the 2014-5 Municipal Year but not for 2013-4.</p> <p>As a member of Council Business Committee, should a report be presented to that committee, I will listen to the arguments before voting on any proposition that may be put.</p>
<p>Councillor Parkinson</p>	<p>I have serious concerns about this proposal as I think, if passed. It would set a precedent for any Chair of a Committee to make changes to the working arrangements of the Council to fit in with their personal circumstances.</p> <p>Traditionally evening Council meetings appear to start at 6pm which allows Councillors to finish the business of the Committee at a reasonable time. Overview and Scrutiny meetings have lasted at least three hours under past Chairman which if started at seven means a late finish for members, officers and staff, some of whom also have a distance to travel to their home.</p> <p>I believe there has also been a lack of consideration for the officers and members of organisations who would be forced to wait for a later meeting to start at the end of a working day and a possible increase in cost to the Council.</p> <p>I appreciate that members who work may find a change an attractive proposition but everyone is aware of the times for meetings when they put their name forward for the Committee and if they feel that they are unable to attend at that time they should not do so.</p>
<p>Councillor Rollins (Substitute Member)</p>	<p>I agree with the later starting time, and the alternate venues.</p>

Councillor Whitaker	<p>I would be more than happy for Overview and Scrutiny to be moved onto 7pm because it will enable people who have been working all day to have some tea and arrive on time.</p> <p>I am not sure about alternative venues for O&S because it might cause a degree of confusion. It is better if it is always in the same venue.</p>
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