

Committee Timetable

8 November 2023

Report of Council Business Committee

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider and agree a timetable of meetings for the municipal year 2024/25 including venues and start times.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) That Council approves the proposed timetable of meetings for the municipal year 2024/25 attached to this report.**
- (2) That Council considers amending the start time of ordinary meetings of Council other than Budget Council.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 12 October 2023, Council considered a draft timetable of meetings for the municipal year 2024/25. The report and appendices are attached to this report. The issue of start times for meetings was raised in the report, which explained that meetings held during the daytime were more cost effective than those starting at 6pm in the evening. However, it was recognised that evening meetings were often easier to attend for those Councillors who worked during the day.
- 1.2 The Committee discussed later start times such as 6.30pm or 7pm for meetings of full Council, to allow more time for working Councillors to prepare for the meeting. It was also suggested that Budget Council, being typically a much longer meeting, would stay at its current time of 18:00.
- 1.3 The Committee resolved:
 - 1) *That the proposed timetable be referred to Council for final determination with an additional recommendation for Members to consider amending the starting time of ordinary meetings of Council other than Budget Council.*
 - 2) *That Officers consult with group leaders and administrators regarding this matter prior to the publication of the report to Council.*

2.0 Consultation

- 2.1 Democratic Support consulted with Group Leaders and Administrators on 17 October. At the time of agenda publication only two groups had replied. The MBI group were content with the start time of Council to remaining at 6pm and the Lib Dem Group did not have a united view with some happy to remain with 6pm and others okay with a 6.30pm start.
- 2.2 Cabinet, on 24 October 2023 decided to livestream their meetings from May 2024, therefore future Cabinet meetings will be held at Morecambe Town Hall in the Council Chamber, to access the equipment required for livestreaming.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Council is asked to consider the draft timetable of meetings referred by Council Business Committee and agree the schedule of meetings, start times and venues to enable rooms to be booked.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None directly arising from this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is likely that the additional hours required by Democratic Support staff to administer the meetings and municipal building staff to facilitate the extended opening of council offices would possibly need to be attributed to overtime. Whilst the amount is unquantifiable at the moment, there is currently no budgetary provision for this and would create further pressure on the general fund.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

HR/Staffing implications:

The Council operates a flexible working hours scheme which was recently updated and approved by trade unions and People and OD Committee. Whilst this does include a bandwidth of 6am to 10.30pm to allow maximum flexibility subject to business need and Chief Officer, approval, it does state:

Standard building opening hours for the main council work base locations at Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls are: 7:30am until 7:30pm. Any hours worked outside of these standard opening hours should be done off premises i.e., hybrid workers should work from home outside of these hours, unless under prior agreement with an employee's Chief Officer.

A later start for Council meetings would be at odds with our flexible working scheme meaning officers who attend and service the meetings are regularly required to attend council buildings outside of the standard hours.

A requirement to regularly work late into the evening may have a negative impact on staff

wellbeing and work-life balance. The council has a progressive approach to hybrid working and a new wellbeing strategy, and later meetings could undermine this.

There is also a national recruitment and retention challenge at present and again later council meetings could jeopardise the council's ability to attract and retain talent.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The s151 Officer has been consulted and would like to draw Members attention to the officer comments within the Financial and Other Resource Implications sections of this report, as well as those of the Monitoring Officer below.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

In general the rights to attend Local Authority meetings are covered by the Employment Rights Act 1996, ss. 50 to 51 and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, s. 10.

There are Statutory Rights, contractual rights and also statutory restrictions.

Statutory Rights

An employer must permit an employee who is a member of a local authority to take time off during the employee's working hours for the following purposes –

1. attendance at a Council meeting or a committee or sub-committee meeting;
2. the doing of any other thing approved by the Council, or anything of a class so approved, for the purpose of the discharge of Council functions or the functions of any committee or sub-committee;
3. attendance at meetings of Cabinet or Cabinet committees;
4. the doing of any other thing by a Cabinet member for the purposes of the discharge of any executive function.

The amount of time off and the occasions on which and any conditions subject to which time off may be taken are those that are reasonable in all the circumstances having regard, in particular, to how much time off is required for the performance of the duties as a councillor and how much time off is required for the performance of the particular duty, how much time off has already been permitted for trade union duties and activities and the circumstances of your employer's business and the effect of your absence on the running of their business.

You have a right to present a complaint to an Employment Tribunal if your employer fails to permit you to take time off however the right is only a right to have time off without pay.

Contractual rights

Your contract of employment may give you additional rights including the right to take time off with pay.

Statutory restrictions

If you are employed by another local authority, there is a statutory limit on the amount of paid leave that your employing local authority may allow you to take to perform your duties as a councillor. For these purposes, a "local authority" includes a county council, a district council, a police authority, a fire and civil defence joint authority, and an integrated transport authority.

The restrictions are that you may not be allowed more than 208 hours paid leave in any

financial year. This does not give you a right to take 208 hours paid leave. It sets a limit on what your employer may grant. Your contract of employment may in fact mean that you are entitled to less than this.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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