

AUDIT COMMITTEE

City Council Meeting Times - 2008/09 19th September 2007

Report of the Head of Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider preferred times for City Council meetings for the year 2008/09.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That consideration be given to the commencement times for meetings of this Committee/body and the Council Business Committee advised accordingly.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 At its meeting held on 28th June 2007, the Council Business Committee considered a report reviewing the start times for meetings included in the timetable for 2007/08. A copy of the report considered by the Business Committee is attached for information.

2.0 Details

2.1 In accordance with Members decision to review the start times for all meetings included in the timetable for 2007/08 following the elections in May 2007, a survey had been carried out amongst all Councillors.

2.2 The results of the survey had proved inconclusive with no clear preference for daytime or evening meetings, but recognition that a variety of start times provided the best opportunity for Member participation.

2.3 The Council Business Committee, therefore, decided to collate some additional information with a view to making any changes for 2008/09, recognising that many Members will have chosen their Committees for this year on the basis of the current start times and their own availability. The Committee advised that all feedback received would be taken into account in setting the timetable for 2008/09. Details of the relevant sections of the resolution are set out below:

- (1) That an item be included on the next agenda of all scheduled meetings requesting consideration of the most appropriate start time for that meeting.
- (2) That Group Administrators be requested to obtain information from their political groups on any Members unable to attend their choice of committee due to its current start time.
- (3) That all feedback received be taken into account in setting the timetable for 2008/09.

2.4 Cabinet and all Committees of the Council are therefore being consulted during September in order to obtain their views and Group Administrators are being asked to obtain any information on whether any Members are currently unable to take part in the Committee(s) of their choice due to the start time being inconvenient.

3.0 Conclusions

3.1 This is a report to obtain feedback to the Committee's request and there are, therefore, no conclusions. However, Members are asked to consider the most appropriate start time for this meeting taking into account convenience to Councillors, but also the public, where public participation is an issue and the availability of other organisations, where relevant, in order for any views to be considered in due course.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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

None.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If an increased number of meetings were to be held in the evenings there may be additional costs associated with the opening of the building and staffing and whilst there is some flexibility within the existing Democratic Representation budget, if Members wish to make large scale changes to the timetable as currently published this will need to be evaluated.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

It is a legal requirement that the Council publishes its timetable of meetings by the commencement of each Municipal Year. Amendments can be made throughout the year provided at least 5 days notice is given.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Council Business Committee dated 28th June 2007.
Consultation responses from Members.

Contact Officer: Stephen Metcalfe
Telephone: 01524 582073
E-mail: smetcalfe@lancaster.gov.uk
Ref: Sjm

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

**City Council Meeting Times - 2007/08
28th June 2007**

Report of the Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider a survey of preferred times for City Council meetings for the year 2007/08.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) **That Members consider the times of City Council meetings for 2007/08.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 11th January 2007 the Committee considered the Meetings Timetable for 2007/08. As part of its decision the Committee resolved:

That the Head of Democratic Services be requested to undertake a survey of Members' preferred times for meetings and report to the first meeting of the Committee following the elections on 3rd May 2007 on the implications of moving to evening meetings.

2.0 Survey Results

- 2.1 In accordance with paragraph 1.1 above a survey has been conducted with every Member of Council being invited to complete a questionnaire, with a reminder also sent to those Members not responding by the deadline, in order for a fully informed decision to be made by this Committee.
- 2.2 There have been 36 responses as part of the consultation. The results are shown in Appendix 1 to this report. The results are inconclusive and there does not appear to be evidence for a complete change to evening meetings. The analysis does show that there is support for times of meetings to commence based on their past duration. Set out in paragraph 5.1 below is a table that sets out the details of average duration over the previous Municipal Year.

3.0 Implications

- 3.1 In making its decision the Committee should be aware of the following implications of moving to evening meetings:

Public engagement:

Meetings such as the Cabinet and Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee have schemes encouraging public engagement through speaking at meetings. Members may feel that these meetings should be held in the evenings in order to encourage public participation but this needs to be balanced against the knowledge that both Cabinet and Planning can be lengthy meetings and dealing with complex issues late at night is not ideal. The scheme for the Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee is popular despite being during the day, with the general public requesting to speak at meetings on a regular basis. Meetings of this Committee commence at 10.30 am in the morning.

Public speaking at Cabinet is a new initiative and it is as yet too early to judge on its success.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also invites the public and representatives from outside organisations to attend meetings and for this reason its start time has been fixed at 6pm, with the Budget and Performance Panel at 4.30pm.

Participation by other Organisations:

A number of meetings require participation by representatives from other organisations. Members are requested to consider the requirements of each prior to making a decision on the commencement of each meeting. In a number of cases representatives of other organisations may not be available to attend evening meetings.

Constitutional changes:

If there were changes to the times of meetings consideration may need to be given, in some circumstances, to amendments to other elements of the Constitution, particularly where a given timescale is set out for the production of Minutes (ie Cabinet minutes etc).

Operational issues:

There are a number of operational issues that will affect Service delivery within the Council. With regard to Democratic Services, for instance, a move to all evening meetings would require a change to their working practices which will impact on the way in which the service is delivered during normal office hours. Changes to terms and conditions will also need to undergo the usual process of consultation and negotiation with the staff concerned and unions. This would also be the case if the number of evening meetings were increased beyond a threshold of what is sustainable under the current working arrangements, say 50% of meetings commencing at 6pm or later.

There would also be staffing issues with regard to Property Services who would be required to cover the opening of Council buildings in the evenings/provide refreshments etc and Officers from other Services who may have to attend meetings to present reports and provide specialist advice to Members. There are also potential health and safety issues to be addressed such as door security during the evenings.

Staff Views:

Democratic Services:

Democratic Support staff who would be affected by any change are aware of this report. Should a large scale move to all evening meetings be proposed negotiations may be required to amend officers' terms and conditions of service.

Property Services:

Property Services staff have commented on the potential cost implications of paying overtime rates and extending heating times in the winter. It should be noted that holding evening meetings in Lancaster Town Hall rather than Morecambe is preferable as the number of rooms available means that there are often public bookings at the same time negating to some extent the additional cost implications and security risks.

Training Events:

A number of training events have recently been held in both the daytime and evenings. The Induction event held at Morecambe Town Hall in the daytime was attended by more Councillors than the evening event at Lancaster Town Hall. However, this may have been for a number of reasons and feedback on these events has yet to be carried out. A comment from a member regarding these events is set out in the Members comments section of this report.

4.0 Member Comments

4.1 Further comments were invited from Members as part of the exercise, details are set out below which may be of use to the Committee in coming to a decision:

Refreshments at afternoon and evening meetings.

Members can choose which Committees they are on depending on their other commitments. There are far fewer than when I first started.

I feel the members of each Committee should have the final say on when to meet.

At least one other Committee should meet later so that working members have more choice. Personnel could be a late meeting as it is usually a short meeting.

Younger Councillors need to have opportunity to gain experience on different Committees. Therefore, we need more evening meetings.

Refurbishment of Morecambe Town Halls Committee Rooms to allow more meetings to take place at Morecambe Town Hall.

If younger people are to be involved in the Council, meetings have to take place outside of work hours.

Meetings should commence based on their past average duration. Not too many long meetings in the evening.

I believe that meetings should be equally balanced between daytime and evenings allowing all Members to take an active role in the Council. Currently only two meetings commence at 6pm. Therefore those who work full time are only able to put themselves forward to be Members of these Committees.

Some training offered to Councillors has only been scheduled for during the working day. Councillors who work are unable to benefit from the training provided.

5.0 Cabinet Member Views

5.1 As Members maybe aware paragraph 1.6, Part 4, Section 4 of the Constitution states:

1.6 Cabinet Meetings - When and Where ?

The Cabinet will meet monthly, alternating between Lancaster Town Hall and Morecambe Town Hall on dates **and times to be agreed by the Members of the Cabinet, to be confirmed by Full Council on an annual basis.**

In accordance with the Constitution Members of Cabinet have been consulted on the commencement time of the meeting. At the time of writing this report 5 responses have been received advising that Members request that meetings continue with the existing commencement time.

6.0 Times and average length of meetings

6.1 For information the current time for each meeting and the average length of meeting times of Council meetings for the previous Municipal Year are set out below:

Meeting	Time	Average length of meeting last year	Frequency
Annual Council	12 noon	1 hour.	1.
Council	2.00 pm	3 hours 10 mins.	8 (including budget and special Councils).
Cabinet	10.00 am	2 hours 35 mins.	11.
Budget and Performance Panel	4.30 pm	1 hour 45 mins.	9.
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	6.00 pm	2 hours 35 mins.	9.
Planning and Highways Regulatory Committee	10.30 am	4 hours.	12.
Licensing Regulatory Committee	2.00 pm	1 hour 50 mins.	8.
Licensing Act Committee	2.00 pm	1 hour.	6 (with Sub-committees called as required).
Personnel Committee	2.00 pm	1 hour 10 mins.	7.
Audit Committee	6.00 pm	1 hour 20 mins.	4.
Council Business Committee	4.00 pm	1 hour 25 mins.	8.
Standards Committee	10.00 am	50 minutes.	4. Additional meetings of this Committee may

			have to be called for any Hearings that may need to be considered
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These commencement times are as stated by the Constitution or confirm current practice, divided between Morecambe and Lancaster Town Halls with a variety of start times.

- 6.2 Members are advised that Democratic Support also services a number of other meetings that are not included in the timetable. These meetings include Partnerships, Task Groups, Cabinet Liaison Groups and also Chairman's Briefings, which, in view of the work commitments of some Members, are held in the evenings. Details are provided below:

Meeting	Time	Average length of meeting last year	Frequency
Cabinet Liaison Groups: Canal Corridor Note: Cabinet, at its meeting held on 5 th June 2007, resolved that no meetings will be arranged until after the conclusion of the planning application stage of the development.	9.30am	2 hours 30 mins. Meetings can last up to a full day.	5 in the previous Municipal Year.
Lancaster and District Chamber Cabinet Liaison Group	5.00 pm	2 hours.	2 a year.
Lancaster University and St. Martin's College Cabinet Liaison Group	5.00 pm	1 hour 30 mins.	3 a year.

Morecambe Cabinet Liaison Group	6.30 pm	1 hour 35 mins.	Quarterly.
Planning Policy	10.00 a.m. (1.00 p.m. on one occasion).	2 hours 6 mins.	3 over 2006/07 (meetings scheduled when required).
Transport	1.00pm.	50 minutes. Only 1 meeting serviced by Democratic Support in the previous Municipal Year. Meeting commenced at 1.00 pm.	Meetings to be called as and when required.
Partnerships: West End Partnership	6pm	2 hours 30 mins.	11 meetings. Usually once a month.
Poulton Neighbourhood Management	5.30pm	2 hours.	11 meetings. Usually once a month.
CARP	7pm	2 hours 30 mins.	14 meetings. Usually once/twice a month.
Luneside	10am and 2pm (alternates times)	2 hours.	4 meetings. Quarterly.
LDRP	5pm	1 hour 30 mins.	5 meetings. Usually quarterly.
Museums	2.30pm	2 hours.	2 meetings a year.
LSP	10am and 1.30pm (alternates times)	2-3 hours.	9 meetings. Once a month.
EDBB	9.30am and 1.30pm 5.30pm (alternates times)	2 hours.	6 meetings. Every two months.
Vision Board	8am and 10.30am and 1.30pm (alternates times)	2 hours 30 mins.	9 meetings. Once a month.
Task Groups:			

Cemeteries	10.00am	1 hour 35 mins.	Met on one occasion - 16 th June 2006 to consider the final report.
Fly Tipping	Usual start time 2pm - at LTH (one occasion 6pm at MTH)	1 hour 13 mins.	5 meetings from 8th June 2006 - 22nd November 2006 on an ad hoc basis.
Grants	6pm	1 hour 36 mins.	5 meetings - from 2/11/06 - 22/2/07.
Homelessness	6pm, with the exception of 1 meeting that commenced at 10.30am.	1 hour 30 mins.	9 meetings (plus several site visits - 3 evening, 1 during day) - from 8/5/.06 - 8/2/07.
Pollution	6pm, with the exception of the first meeting that commenced at 7pm.	1 hour 32 mins.	5 meetings (plus one planned for 11 th June and several informal meetings held at night - from 4/4/06 - 17/4/07).

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 As previously mentioned the results of the Survey are set out at Appendix 1. The results of the survey are inconclusive and there is insufficient evidence, based on the survey, to make recommendations to Members on the alteration of the commencement times of meetings. However, the Committee may feel that there is a need for more public engagement/involvement particularly where there is interest from the general public in the Agenda, or where they may be invited to partake in some way.

7.2 Members are asked to consider the options set out in the report in order for the publication of times of meetings for 2007/08.

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

None.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If an increased number of meetings were to be held in the evenings there may be additional costs associated with the opening of the building and staffing and whilst there is some flexibility within the existing Democratic Representation budget, if Members wish to make large scale changes to the timetable as currently published this will need to be evaluated.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

It is a legal requirement that the Council publishes its timetable of meetings by the commencement of each Municipal Year. Amendments can be made throughout the year provided at least 5 days notice is given.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer has been involved in the preparation of this report and has no comments to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Consultation responses from Members.

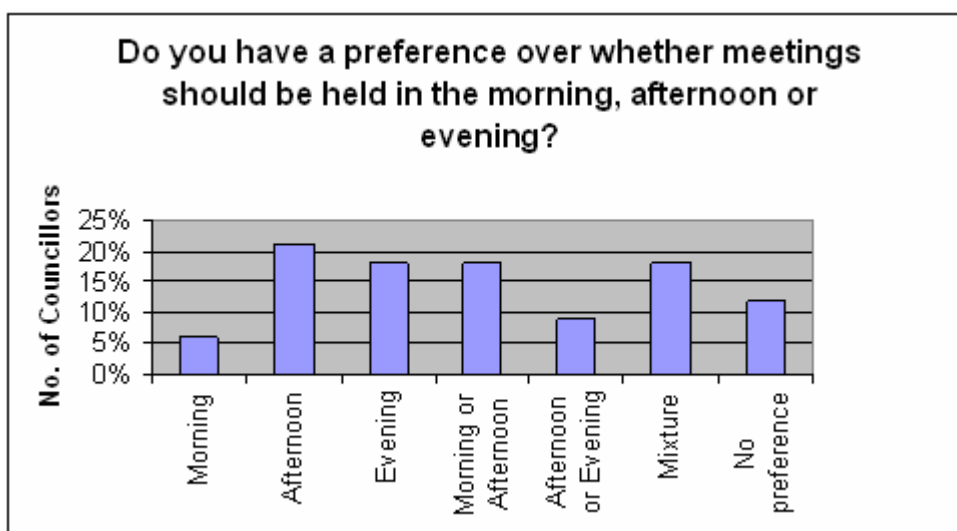
Contact Officer: Stephen Metcalfe

Telephone: 01524 582073

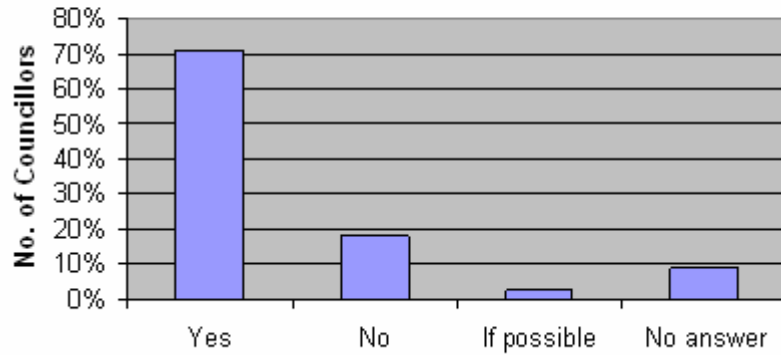
E-mail: smetcalfe@lancaster.gov.uk

Ref: Sjm

ANALYSIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES



Do you feel that the times meetings commence at should be based on their past average duration?



Please advise the specific time you feel meetings should commence?

