

<b>Report to</b>	Democratic Services Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	30 September 2022
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Councillor Julie Matthews / Steve Price
<b>Report author</b>	Democratic Services Manager
<b>Title</b>	Timing of Meetings Survey 2022

## **1. What is the report about?**

1.1. The report outlines statutory requirements under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the 'Measure') in respect of surveying elected members on the timing and location of Council meetings.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

2.1. An aim of the Measure is to promote and support membership of local authorities. The times at which meetings take place can be a significant factor in enabling current members to attend meetings and could also affect whether potential candidates stand for election. Under the Measure local authorities should survey their members on their preferred times and locations for meetings at least once a term.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

3.1. That the Democratic Services Committee considers and comments on the arrangements for a survey of members on the timing and location of meetings.

## **4. Report details**

### **Background to the Timing of Meetings**

4.1 Statutory guidance to the Measure indicates that a local authority's meetings should 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.

4.2 At present, the Council and principal committee meetings start in the morning. A number of internal member-level meetings start in the afternoon, and one internal forum (the Prestatyn and Meliden Member Area Group) starts its meetings in the evening. The current pattern was arrived at following surveys with members in 2013 and 2018 and from the recommendations of a member-level task and finish group in 2016.

### **Location of Meetings**

4.3 In respect of venues the previous surveys confirmed County Hall, Ruthin as the preferred venue for most members with many citing its central location within the county as an advantage. County Hall's meeting facilities were also suitable and accessible for meetings open to the public. Some use was also made of the meeting rooms at the Council's offices at Russell House, Rhyl and Caledfryn, Denbigh.

4.4 The Covid-19 pandemic ushered in new ways of working, including a move to virtual meetings. Holding virtual council and committee meetings initially required emergency legislation which was subsequently made permanent under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. This required local authorities to have arrangements that enables members who are not in the same place to attend those meetings.

4.5 Last year, a member 'New Ways of Working Group' considered how members should conduct future meetings and what ICT equipment they needed to do so. The working group's proposals were endorsed by the Democratic Services Committee in November 2021 and adopted by full Council in December 2021. In considering whether the formal, public meetings should be entirely virtual or hybrid, Council chose them to be hybrid meetings (allowing members to choose to attend in person or remotely). For efficiency (the saving of travel time for example) and environmental reasons Council decided that internal meetings such as the Member Area Group meetings should generally be held as virtual meetings.

## **The Survey**

4.6 The survey attached as appendix 1 is in draft form and may be amended following the Committee's comments and recommendations. The final version of the survey will be online and circulated to all elected and co-opted members of the Council's principal committees with the collated results and comments reported to full Council for a decision on the arrangements for future meetings.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1. There is no direct contribution to the corporate priorities.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. The Council utilises existing room based, virtual and hybrid resources to conduct its meetings and these are flexible enough to accommodate changes to the meeting arrangements. Options relating to when and where meetings are held could have cost or staff time implications depending on the scale and nature of the options.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. An impact assessment is not required for this report.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. This is a consultative report for the Democratic Services Committee. All members will be invited to complete a survey on the timing and location of meetings.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. Not required for this report to the Democratic Services Committee.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1 The arrangements for meetings can be a significant factor in enabling current members to attend meetings and could also affect whether potential candidates stand for election.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1 Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.