

Report to	Council
Date of meeting	31 January 2023
Lead Member	Councillor Julie Matthews
Head of Service	Lisa Jones, Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Report author	Steve Price, Democratic Services Manager
Title	Survey of Members on the Timing of Meetings

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 of Council meetings. A survey of elected members was opened during December and January and the results are detailed in this report.

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 elected members on their preferred times for meetings.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. That Council considers the results of the survey and confirms the arrangements for the timing of Council, committee and other member 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 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.
- 4.3 The Democratic Services Committee confirmed the questions to be asked of members for the survey that was opened from December 2022 until mid-January 2023. The survey questions are attached as appendix 1.
- 4.4 At the time of writing this report 34 responses (72% of the membership) had been received. The results of the survey are attached as appendix 2 and further summarised below.
- The majority of members prefer morning meetings
 - The majority of members do not want to see the timing of meetings rotate
 - Members cited evenings as being the most difficult time for them to attend meetings

Location of Meetings

- 4.5 The Council holds many of its meetings as hybrid meetings, where attendees can choose to attend virtually or in-person. Hybrid meetings developed from the virtual meetings introduced as a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic and were subsequently made permanent for certain meetings under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 4.6 The Council's policy for holding meetings was developed by a member working group and reviewed by the Democratic Services Committee prior to adoption by full

Council in December 2021. The new 'Timing of Meetings' survey included questions to identify preferred locations for in-person meeting venues and whether members were experiencing problems accessing virtual or in-person meetings. The results are shown in appendix 2 and further summarised below.

- When attending a meeting in-person, a slight majority of members had a preference for where the venue would be, with many citing more than 1 location. Members made 8 references to Ruthin; 7 to Rhyl; 6 to Denbigh and 3 to Prestatyn.
- The majority of members do not experience difficulties attending meetings remotely. Of those who did 'technical issues' were the most commonly cited difficulty.
- The majority of members do not experience problems attending meetings that are in-person only. Of those who do, being allowed sufficient time of work appeared to be the biggest problem.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Themes?

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

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

6.1 The Council utilises existing resources to conduct its meetings and these are likely to be flexible enough to accommodate changes to the timing of meeting arrangements.

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

7.1. An impact assessment is not required for this statutory survey of members on the timing of meetings.

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

8.1. The Democratic Services Committee was consulted on the issues being raised in this report. All members were invited to complete a survey on the timing of meetings.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 As highlighted in section 6 any changes to the timing of meeting arrangements can be maintained within existing financial resources. The service works closely with the Finance Service and any future pressures can be brought through the annual review of service pressures if required.

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.