

Chichester District Council

CABINET

8 March 2016

Timing of Council Meetings

1. Contacts

Report Author:

Diane Shepherd, Chief Executive
Tel: 01243 534709 E-mail: dshepherd@chichester.gov.uk

Cabinet Member:

Cllr Philippa Hardwick, Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance
Tel: 01428 661866 E-mail: phardwick@chichester.gov.uk

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. To recommend to Council the proposed changes to Council meetings as listed in paragraph 5.3(a) and (b).
- 2.2. Cabinet to note that there was no clear majority for changing the time of Council and is invited to recommend to Council either:
 - (a) A morning start time of 10:30am (with briefing sessions starting at 9:30am); or
 - (b) An afternoon start time. If the majority of Members vote for an afternoon meeting they will subsequently be asked to vote on either:
 - i. A 2:00pm start time (with briefing sessions starting at 12:30pm); or
 - ii. A 2:30pm start time (with briefing sessions starting at 1:00pm).

3. Background

- 3.1. The Council's constitution sets out the procedural standing orders for the running of Council meetings. Dates and timings of meetings are agreed annually by Council, although additional meetings and changes to dates and times of meetings may be agreed with the Chairman's consent.
- 3.2. The majority of the Council's meetings are held at 2:30pm and many are preceded by a briefing session on a relevant topic and an open forum where Members can ask questions of the Senior Leadership Team. Council has, in the past, experimented with holding meetings at different times of the day but Members have always voted to revert back 2:30pm start times for Council meetings.

4. Outcomes to be achieved

- 4.1. To ensure that Council business is transacted efficiently and effectively.

- 4.2. That the timing of Council meetings is such that the majority of Members who wish to contribute to the debate have the opportunity to do so in accordance with the Council's rules on debate.

5. Proposal

- 5.1. The last two meetings were particularly long and were preceded by both an information topic and an open forum. This led to a number of Members asking if the timing of the meetings could be changed and whether the business of Council could be discharged more efficiently.
- 5.2. An email was sent by the Chief Executive to all Members asking questions on length, frequency and timing of Council meetings. Details of the email can be found in Appendix 1.
- 5.3. Appendix 2 provides a summary of the responses received. As might be expected, there was a variety of views expressed and, based on these responses, the Chief Executive recommends that the following changes should be made:
- (a) The Length of meetings:
- Introductions by Cabinet Members should be limited to a maximum of 400 words, or 3 minutes, unless it is a really significant or complex topic.
 - There should be no introductions by Cabinet members for items that are to be noted, such as Urgent Decisions.
 - It is proposed that a Members' Task and Finish Group be set up to review the Council's Constitution and any proposed changes are reported to Cabinet and Council in July 2016. The terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group are set out in Appendix 3.
 - Although, it is important to discharge Council business efficiently and effectively, it is more important that Members have an opportunity to express their views and, therefore, there should be no curtailment of the length of the meeting. The current rules of debate are clearly set out in Constitution and no changes are proposed (see Appendix 4). It is the responsibility of the Chairman to determine how long a debate should last and whether a Member is unduly monopolising the debate.
 - For the reasons set out above there should be no change to the time allocated to 'Questions to the Executive' but Members should be encouraged to submit written questions in advance.
 - Members should not be asked to stand when asking questions at Council.

(b) Frequency of Meetings

- As a matter of principle, there should not be more than two ordinary Cabinet meetings reporting to any one Council meeting and extra

meetings should be arranged as and when required. The Chairman already has discretion to hold additional meetings or to cancel Council meetings.

(c) Timing of Meetings

In the email sent from the Chief Executive on 5 February 2016, Members were asked to place the following options in order of preference:

Option A – A 9:30 am start time with a one hour briefing (up to one hour with either an open forum or special topic but not both) lasting until 10:30am, with an 11:00 am start for a Council meeting aiming to finish by 1:30pm, with no lunch.

Option B – A start time of 12 noon with a one hour briefing (up to one hour with either an open forum or special topic but not both) with 30 minutes for lunch at 1pm. Council would commence at 1:30pm aiming to finish by 4pm.

Option C – No change to the present arrangement of briefings before lunch and then a 2:30pm start to Council.

The results, based on responses received, are:

Option A – 12 (25%)
Option B – 8 (17%)
Option C – 9 (19%)
No preference – 4 (8%)
Two equal preferences – 2 (4%)
No response – 13 (27%)

The issue on preferred timing is not clear cut and, although Option A scored the highest number for first preference, no one Option had a clear majority. Even though Members were asked to rank their preferences, many did not and it has not been possible, therefore, to ascertain 2nd and 3rd preferences.

Four Members had no preference and 13 didn't respond. A number of Members who stated Option B or C as their preferred Option also stated they would like the meeting to start at 2pm instead of 1:30pm or 2:30pm. In addition, two Members stated two options as their equal preference. Some working Members expressed concern at their ability to attend Council meetings if they started in the morning.

Option A has the highest preference (25%), but not a clear majority. Given that there is no clear majority for any of the preferences and 18 Members either didn't respond or had no preference, this would suggest there is no clear mandate for change. It is therefore proposed that Option B is eliminated, as this is the least favoured Option and Council is asked to vote for either Option A or Option C. In addition, if the majority of the Members vote for Option C, then it is proposed that there should be the sub-option of starting the meeting either at 2pm or at 2:30pm. The thinking behind this is that a 2pm start (with any information briefings starting at 12:30, to include lunch) should allow for the majority of Council meetings to be finished by 4pm, as late finishes were a concern for some members.

6. Alternatives that have been considered

6.1. Three options were considered, as set out in the report.

7. Resource and legal implications

7.1. None

8. Consultation

8.1. All Members, whose views are reported herein.

9. Community impact and corporate risks

9.1. Whichever option is chosen, Members will need to ensure, where practical, that the Council's policies do not deter unrepresented groups from fully participating in the democratic process.

9.2. Members also need to be mindful of allowing open and transparent discussions at Council where Members who wish to comment have the opportunity to do so.

10. Other Implications

10.1. None

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Email to all Members from the Chief Executive.

Appendix 2 – Responses from Members

Appendix 3 – Terms of Reference for proposed Task & Finish Group on the Constitution

Appendix 4 – Extract from the Council's Constitution on rules of debate.

12. Background Papers

None

Email from Diane Shepherd, the Chief Executive, to all Members
Friday, 5 February 2016

Dear Member

Council meetings

Following the relatively long Council meetings in December and January, some members have expressed a preference for an earlier start to Council meetings.

I suggest we need to give consideration not only to the timing of meetings but also how their length might be reduced and how often they should be held.

I set out below some suggestions on length, frequency and timing of Council meetings:

Length of Council meetings

1. Introductions by Cabinet members: assume members have read the papers and limit to a maximum of 400 words or 3 minutes unless it is a really big issue like leisure
2. Items for noting like Urgent Decisions: no introduction
3. Questions to Executive: retain at 40 minutes but with encouragement of written questions in advance so answers can also be prepared in advance, allowing more questions to be handled.
4. Review of constitution: Expand the planned officer report to cabinet and council to include suggestions of matters which need not go to Council (eg consultation stage of proposed planning and other policies which would come to Council ONLY for final approval before implementation).
5. Chairman to take a list of speakers before each debate and urge each member to limit to one speech per debate but allow new points or rebuttals in a second intervention.
6. Possibly indicate a finishing time on the agenda “subject to extension if approved by a majority of councillors present”.
7. Should members be asked to stand when making speeches?

Frequency of Council meetings

The Calendar of meetings should ensure that no more than two Cabinet meetings should be referring matters to any one Council meeting. We will need an extra Council meeting in late April 2017 to meet this requirement if it is agreed. This there would be 11 Cabinet meetings linking in to 7 Council meetings. However, the option remains to have additional/cancel Council meetings as necessary to meet the needs of the Council's business.

Timing of Council meetings

Considerations on timing:

- We need to ensure time for SLT open sessions and for other member briefings, preferably before Council but limit their total length to one hour to avoid too long a day.
- The start time of the pre-meetings should reflect travelling time and traffic conditions so should not be earlier than 9.30a.m.

Options for timing:

- A. Have a 9.30 am start time for up to one hour's briefing (either an open forum or special topic but not both) lasting until 10.30am, with an 11.00 am start for a Council meeting aiming to finish by 1.30pm, with no lunch.
- B. Have a start time of 12 noon for up to one hour's briefing (either an open forum or special topic but not both) with 30 minutes for lunch at 1pm. Full Council would commence at 1.30pm; this should ensure a finish by 4pm, given the measures above to reduce the length of meetings.
- C. No change in the present arrangements of briefings before lunch and then a 2.30pm start to Council.

Please indicate your preference using the table below and return to member services by Friday 12 February.

Name:

OPTION	VOTE1,2,3 in order of preference
A	
B	
C	

Please also let me have any other comments or suggestions regarding the above. Based on these preferences I intend to make recommendations to the next Council meeting on timings and the format of the meeting. We are also undertaking a full review of the Council's Constitution to ensure all Council business is done in the most efficient, effective and democratic way. The full review will be presented to the May Council for approval.

Please add any additional Comments:

Best Regards

Diane

Diane Shepherd

Chief Executive

Executive Officers

Chichester District Council

Tel: 01243 534709 | Fax: 01243 776766 | dshepherd@chichester.gov.uk |

<http://www.chichester.gov.uk>

www.facebook.com/ChichesterDistrictCouncil | www.twitter.com/ChichesterDC

Responses from Members

- A. Have a 9:30 am start time for up to one hour's briefing (either an open forum or special topic but not both) lasting until 10:30am, with an 11:00 am start for a Council meeting aiming to finish by 1:30pm, with no lunch.
- B. Have a start time of 12 noon for up to one hour's briefing (either an open forum or special topic but not both) with 30 minutes for lunch at 1pm. Full Council would commence at 1:30pm; this should ensure a finish by 4pm, given the measures above to reduce the length of meetings.
- C. No change in the present arrangements of briefings before lunch and then a 2:30pm start to Council.

Order of Votes	Comments
B with a 2pm start	Have more Council meetings – don't curtail debate
Did not specify	Open to any suggestions as has no work commitments
A B (not C)	
C but could start at 2pm	Easier for working members and public to take an afternoon off than to split the day.
A C B	
Did not specify	Start time not an issue, but no more than 2 hours
B	
A (9.30-11); B(11-1); C(11-2.30)	
A B C	
Did not specify, but prefers 9.30 start, so assume A	Concentrate on business of meeting; not what goes before.
C B A	Business requirements in am so morning Council meetings would not work for him
A	9.30 start and 1.30 finish enables a ½ day out
Did not specify	OK with any time; go with majority. Supports 1-6
C B A with 2pm start	Supports 1-6.
C B A	
C B A with 2pm start	Take into consideration the needs of working age Cllrs
Did not specify; prefers morning starts but suggests alternating 9.30 and 2.30 starts so assume equal preference A & C	Gives parents/carers perspective, to avoid school pick-up times.
Did not specify	OK with any time; prefers daylight
C A B	Working Cllrs should work first half of day. Supports better use of time suggestions.
A B C	Full time carer; not easy to get late pm cover
C	Prefers pm to get ½ day teaching first. Would like late pm or evening meetings.
A B	
A B C	
C B A – 2pm start	
C B A	
A B C	
B C A	Increasing traffic and need to make domestic and business arrangements make 9.30 start difficult. Proper debate important
B – midday start	

B C A	Would be happy to see a 10:00 start time for Full Council, followed by the questions to SLT, followed by briefings.
B & C (B preferable)	
B A C	Encourage members to settle questions and points of detail before issues get to Council meeting
B C A – 2pm start	Enable people to have their say, subject to good chairmanship.
A B C	Favours a morning start
A B C	Leans to earlier start with 4 pm cut off
B A C	

First choices, where stated or implied:-

A = 12 (25%)

B = 8 (17%)

C = 9 (19%)

Nil response = 13 (27%)

Did not specify = 4 (8%)

Two equal preferences = 2 (4%)

Terms of Reference for proposed Task & Finish Group on the
Constitution

1. Membership:

Chairman – Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance

Four other Members to be appointed by Cabinet on the recommendation of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance – to include at least 1 Member from the opposition groups.

2. Frequency – or number – of meetings

Two meetings to be held.

3. Reporting

Report to be taken to Cabinet and Council in July 2016.

4. Broad Objectives

- To review the Council's Constitution and advise Cabinet and Council on any changes. In particular:
 - How decisions are made; and
 - The effective operation of the Council's business

5. Advisors

John Ward, Head of Finance and Governance
Philip Coleman, Member Services Manager

APPENDIX 4

Extract (Section 4.8 – Rules of Debate) from the Council's Constitution

Rules of Debate

- 8.1 A proposal may only be discussed after it has been **moved** by one Member and **seconded** by another.
- 8.2 A member when speaking shall address the chairman of the meeting.
- 8.3 The Chairman will decide the **order of speeches** by Members and (at a Council meeting).whether a Member will be permitted to speak more than once.
- 8.4 Speeches by Members shall normally last not more than **5 minutes** unless the chairman approves a longer period.
- 8.5 **Amendments** to motions shall be moved and seconded before they are discussed and the chairman has discretion to allow more than one amendment to be discussed at the same time.
- 8.6 A Member may raise, without notice, any matter relating to the **procedure** of the meeting (for example rules of debate, reference of an item to a committee, appointing a new committee, sub-committee or task and finish group etc., or a point of order – that is, an alleged breach of a statutory provision or a Standing Order).
- 8.7 During a debate a Member may move a “**closure motion**” that is, that the motion being discussed be voted upon, or that the Meeting should proceed to the next business, or that the Meeting should be adjourned.
- 8.8 If a “**closure motion**” is seconded, the chairman shall decide if the matter has been discussed sufficiently and he may then ask the Member who moved the original motion for his comments and the meeting shall then vote on the “closure motion”.
- 8.9 A meeting shall not discuss any personal matter relating to a **member of staff** (for example, his appointment, promotion, salary or conduct) until it has excluded the public and the press.