

# Chichester District Council

**FULL COUNCIL**

**24 September 2019**

## **Amendment to Committee Timings**

### **1. Contacts**

#### **Report Author**

Nicholas Bennett – Divisional Manager Democratic Services  
Telephone: 01243 534657 E-mail: [nbennett@chichester.gov.uk](mailto:nbennett@chichester.gov.uk)

### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Members note the responses to the consultation and that based upon the responses to that consultation confirm that timings of meetings remain unchanged at this time.**
- 2.2 That a working group be established by the Leader after the trial period to consider whether a change to Committee meetings should be recommended to Council for the subsequent four year committee cycle from 2023.**

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Following the May 2019 elections some members raised questions at full Council asking whether a change to meeting times could be considered. Officers were asked to carry out a survey to assess member views of a change to committee timings to include evening meetings.
- 3.2 Democratic services carried out a survey of members asking them for their preferences as to timing and issues informing those views.

### **4. Outcomes to be Achieved**

- 4.1 The Council invests a great deal of money and effort into providing live feed and recordings of its public meetings. Whilst that technology means that access to committee meetings has never been better, it remains a right for the public to attend meetings in person.
- 4.2 Attendance at meetings is part of that transparency. Members also require certainty as to timing so that they can plan their schedules and be available to the public. The desired outcome would be that the future timetable improves this transparency and access and was manageable for members.

### **6. The survey of members**

- 6.1 The Divisional Manager for Democratic Services carried out the survey of member opinions and this was circulated to all members with almost all responding. The responses were analysed and the findings are set out in more detail below, but 61% of members felt there should be no change and that there was no benefit to a trial.
- 6.2 The majority view of members is that meetings should continue to be held to the existing timetable that is, during the day. Whilst there were strongly expressed views in favour of evening meetings from a small percentage of the membership and a similar small percentage in favour of a trial to assess any benefits further.

- 6.3 Only one committee appears to have an arguable majority in favour of a trial, Corporate Governance.
- 6.4 Several members gave opinions about the likely impacts as they see them. There were two main positions set out by proponents for and against evening meetings. Some members commented that they believed evening meetings would be positive for public engagement and Council membership.
- 6.5 On the other hand the majority of members comments that evening meetings would be difficult for members to balance against the other responsibilities of their role. Specific examples were given by several members of how much evening time they already give to their public duties. These included significant evening commitments directly linked to their District roles – attending their own Parish Council meetings or similar partner meetings.
- 6.6 One member commented from their own experience that evening meetings have an impact upon those travelling some distance especially in the winter in the context of this authority's large footprint.
- 6.7 Some members set out thoughts as to how evening meetings or daytime meetings each benefit different types of people and the broadest consideration of those comments leads to a view that all timings will have impacts upon some groups and that no timing suits everyone.
- 6.8 A common argument put by members was that they made an assessment when they stood as a member of how they might balance their roles including their private lives against the responsibilities of being in the Council against the demands of the Council timetables of meetings and that to change those at this point in the committee cycle caused them significant concerns.

## **7. Alternatives Considered**

- 7.1 The alternatives as to committee timings and the way forward were as set out below, with a breakdown of responses from members as a percentage:
- Make no changes – 61%
  - Have a six month trial – 18%
  - Move to evening meetings – 21%
- 7.2 Analysing responses by committee showed similar ratios for each committee. However there were two exceptions. Cabinet were entirely of a view that there should be no change to timings, and Corporate Governance had a 33% preference for a trial of evening meetings. These responses indicate that there is not sufficient support from members at this time for an immediate change but comments given suggest that several members, whilst a minority, are extremely keen to develop changes which they believe will lead to improvement in public access and improve diversity of the membership.
- 7.3 The strong messages from the majority however, was that they were concerned about the impact of evening meetings upon them and their diverse public roles at parishes and so on and that any change should not be taken forwards without significant lead time. Comments were received that it would be best if a change only takes place at the time of the next electoral cycle so that candidates would stand fully informed about the timing of meetings and could consider that against their other activities.

7.4 If members wished to run a trial Corporate Governance and Audit Committee may be the most suited to that trial based upon the relevant strength of support for that idea in the membership of that specific committee as set out at Paragraph 7.2 above.

## 8. Resource and Legal Implications

8.1 There would be staffing implications. There would need to be formal consultation with staff and equalities impact assessments carried out at that time. Some changes to contracts may be required and of course if staff worked evenings they would need to be given time in lieu which will impact upon availability at other times. These issues can all be managed but will take time to work through.

## 9. Consultation

9.1 All members were consulted as described in the report.

## 10. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

10.1 A change that affects when the public can access committees and engage with members must have a community impact but as set out in the body of the report it is difficult to draw wider understanding without a public consultation. Such a consultation will form part of a working group if established.

10.2 There are no significant corporate risks identified from the matters covered by this report.

## 11 Other Implications

<b>Are there any implications for the following?</b>		
If you tick "Yes", list your impact assessment as a background paper in paragraph 13 and explain any major risks in paragraph 9		
	Yes	No
<b>Crime and Disorder</b> The Council has a duty "to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area". Do the proposals in the report have any implications for increasing or reducing crime and disorder?		X
<b>Climate Change and Biodiversity</b> Are there any implications for the mitigation of/adaptation to climate change or biodiversity issues? If in doubt, seek advice from the Environmental Strategy Unit (ESU).		X
<b>Human Rights and Equality Impact</b> You should complete an Equality Impact Assessment when developing new services, policies or projects or significantly changing existing ones. For more information, see Equalities FAQs and guidance on the intranet or contact Corporate Policy.		X
<b>Safeguarding and Early Help</b> The Council has a duty to cooperate with others to safeguard children and adults at risk. Do these proposals have any implication for either increasing or reducing the levels of risk to children or adults at risk? The Council has committed to dealing with issues at the earliest opportunity, do these proposals have any implication in reducing or increasing demand on Council services?		X

<p><b>General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)</b> Does the subject of the report have significant implications for processing data likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals? Processing that is likely to result in a high risk includes (but is not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• systematic and extensive processing activities and where decisions that have legal effects – or similarly significant effects – on individuals.</li> <li>• large scale processing of special categories of data or personal data relation to criminal convictions or offences.</li> <li>• Any larger scale processing of personal data that affects a large number of individuals; and involves a high risk to rights and freedoms eg based on the sensitivity of the processing activity.</li> <li>• large scale, systematic monitoring of public areas (including by CCTV).</li> </ul> <p>Note - If a high risk is identified a Privacy Impact Assessment must be provided to the Data Protection Officer.</p>		X
<p><b>Health and Wellbeing</b> The Council has made a commitment to ‘help our communities be healthy and active’. You should consider both the positive and negative impacts of your proposal on the health and wellbeing of communities and individuals living and working in the district. Is your proposal likely to impact positively or negatively on certain groups and their ability to make healthy choices, for example low income families, carers, older people/children and young people. Are there implications that impact on areas of the district differently? eg the rural areas or those wards where health inequalities exist. If in doubt ask for advice from the Health and Wellbeing team.</p>		X
<p><b>Other</b> (please specify)</p>		X

## 12 Appendices

12.1 None

## 13 Background Papers

13.1 None