

Chichester District Council

FULL COUNCIL

22 November 2022

Committee Calendar of Meetings May 2023 – May 2024 and Evening Meeting Trial

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Full Council votes to approve either the committee calendar of meetings for May 2023 to May 2024 in Appendix A or Appendix B of this report.**
- 2.2 That if the calendar detailed in Appendix B be agreed then a guillotine of 8.00pm be applied to all those meetings starting at 4pm.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The committee calendar of meetings runs from the Annual Council meeting held in May of each year to the May of the following year.
- 3.2 At the Full Council meeting on 22 September 2020 as per minute 26 the Leader Cllr Lintill confirmed her commitment to consider meeting timings prior to the next district elections. An evening meeting trial of the following meetings starting at 6.00pm took place:
 - Cabinet – 6 September 2022
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 20 September 2022
 - Full Council – 27 September 2022
- 3.3 The public attendance at each meeting was as follows:
 - Cabinet – 6 September 2022 = 1
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 20 September 2022 = 0
 - Full Council – 27 September 2022 = 6 (with two people remaining past 7pm)

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1 The calendar provides a timetable to enable the effective planning of Chichester District Council business.

5. Proposal

- 5.1 The 2023 Elections Task and Finish Group were asked to consider the evening meeting trial and make a recommendation/s to Full Council. The Group was made up of Cllr Purnell (Chair), Cllr Brown, Cllr McAra, Cllr Moss, Cllr Plant and Cllr Sutton.
- 5.2 The Elections Task and Finish Group put forward two proposals for consideration as set out in Appendices A and B (Appendix A – Calendar of meetings pattern remains the same, Appendix B – Calendar of meetings pattern with Full Council starting at 4pm).

6. Alternatives Considered

- 6.1 The Elections Task and Finish Group were presented with a third option for all public meetings to take place in the evening. Taking the feedback received into account the Group were not in favour of this option. The cost implication included keeping the building open longer include heating, lighting, insurance and staffing totalling £10,000.
- 6.2 The Group also considered a variant of option B with Full Council meetings taking place in the evening starting from 6pm, with a guillotine at 10pm opting for Appendix B instead.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 Staffing was considered for meetings held past 6pm. This includes the Senior Leadership Team, Democratic Services, Facilities and report authors. There is a requirement for all staff to work within the Working Time Directive which requires 11 hours daily rest and in line with the council's internal policy 30 minutes minimum break after each six hour period worked.
- 7.2 The Council is under a duty to hold meetings to carry out decision making for "lawful common purposes" (**Sharp v Dawes 1876**) and procedures for the summoning, constitution and conduct of meetings is established in Statute, principally the **Local Government Act 1972**, complemented by the **Local Government and Housing Act 1989, Part 1** and the **Local Government Act 2000** (as amended). Broadly the Council is required to have arrangements which are suitable to regulate proper achievement of the goal of effective meetings delivering lawful decisions. The alternatives are all compliant with these legal duties.
- 7.3 Any decision made on the meeting times should ideally remain in place for the 2023-2024 Calendar of Meetings. Due to the decision making cycle it is not preferable to change before 2024 and that whilst technically possible the statutory process of setting calendar annually and changing in as controlled a way as possible is preferable to ensure transparency and avoid confusion to the public or to new members making their arrangements.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 All members were invited to complete a feedback form which was provided in paper format at the Full Council evening meeting and by email afterwards. In total 26 members replied. The results can be found in Appendix C to the report.
- 8.2 The Task and Finish Group considered a summary of the member feedback (feedback is detailed in full at Appendix C), the meeting times of other West Sussex Council's (Appendix D) and officer feedback (summarised in this report).
- 8.3 The Group considered the option for a greater number of evening meetings and discussed what would happen if the business of a meeting were not finished prior to a 10.00pm guillotine (applied to the evening meeting trial). Meetings are currently arranged well in advance to ensure access to the room and availability of members and officers. This would also impact members of the public attending meetings and then being asked to attend again if their item is not heard. Additional work would also be required by the Democratic Services team who would have to arrange a new meeting whilst some of the team would be due to take time off in lieu.
- 8.4 Several members raised positive feedback that they had not had to take leave from their employment to attend the meetings and that there would be greater opportunity for people in work to become councillors.
- 8.5 Many other members raised concerns that evening meetings pose diary clashes as it is not logistically possible to avoid all parish meetings as these are typically held in the evening. Due to the district having 67 parishes it would not be possible to consult with them all. They could however be sent the Calendar of Meetings once agreed.
- 8.6 A number of members also stated in their feedback that they were unable to eat an evening meal prior to 10pm and they had concerns about travelling home later in the evening either due to the rural nature of their location or because there is a lack of public transport available at that time of night. Other members did not experience the same problem.
- 8.7 Officers including the Senior Leadership Team, Democratic Services team, Facilities Team and regular report authors were consulted regarding the meeting dates and evening meetings.
- 8.8 The Democratic Services team and Facilities team raised a number of considerations related to evening meetings. This included the running of the teams as both teams are small. The trial showed that Democratic Services would require two members of staff to work each meeting and some additional Facilities staff may be required. This would provide business resilience for both teams, additional safety for the Facilities Officer locking the building and technical support and monitoring for Democratic Services. The associated time off in lieu of a meeting would impact the daytime availability of all teams including the Democratic Services team something which has been sought by members historically. Officers would still continue to receive emails and requests that would need to be caught up on. The Facilities team would also need to check the building is empty before locking up.

- 8.9 Senior Management assisted by HR would be required to consult with staff and staff side/Unison if contractual changes or agreement are required. For those who drive parking would be accommodated outside the council's building for staff wellbeing and safety for the day of the evening meeting. Evening working would also impact upon the work life balance of officers impacting on others in the household, mealtimes and leisure activities. Having two staff on duty for evening meetings would particularly impact the Democratic Services team. A total of 62 hours and 30 minutes were accrued by officers during the course of the trial.
- 8.10 The building would also be required to be opened for the duration of the meeting and for approximately 30 to 60 minutes after to enable finalising of recordings and clearing of the room so it can be used the following morning. Consideration would need to be given to how much of the building is left open and how this is managed as currently staff are required to leave by 6.30pm.
- 8.11 There would be a requirement for a Fire Warden and Facilities to be on hand for First Aid at all public meetings in the evening. Additional members of staff would be required for any planned protests.
- 8.12 The public were also consulted on evening meeting trials via social media following the evening meeting trial. There were a total of eight responses. The points raised by members of the public can be found in Appendix E to the report.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

9.1 The cost implication for Appendix B includes keeping the building open longer include heating, lighting, insurance and staffing. Members would need to advise how this cost would be met. It has been calculated as follows:

- £55 per hour x 2 hours for 7.00pm-9.00pm = £110
- £110 x 8 meetings = £880 (for utilities and one member of facilities staff)
- Following staff consultation agreement either TOIL or overtime payment x 5 SLT, 1 Monitoring Officer, 2 Democratic Services, 2 Report Authors = 20 hours per meeting x 8 = 160 hours per year

10. Other Implications

Are there any implications for the following?		
	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder		X
Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation Virtual meetings reduce travel.	X	
Human Rights and Equality Impact This is a change which has to be evaluated to assess impacts on minority groups of each recommendation	X	
Safeguarding and Early Help		X
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)		X
Health and Wellbeing Staffing impact on working hours and a contractual change of working conditions would be required.	X	
Other (please specify)		X

11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix A - Calendar of Meetings 2023-2024 using current timings

11.2 Appendix B – Calendar of Meetings 2023-2023 with Full Council starting time of 4pm

11.3 Appendix C – Member Questionnaire feedback

11.4 Appendix D – Meeting times for other Councils in the West Sussex region

11.5 Appendix E - Public feedback comments

12. Background Papers

12.1 None.