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**North
Northamptonshire
Council**

Meeting: Democracy and Standards Committee
Date: Monday 15th April, 2024
Time: 7.00 pm
Venue: Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, NN17 1QB

To members of the Democracy and Standards Committee:
Councillor Andy Mercer (Chair), Councillor Ian Jelley (Vice-Chair), Councillor Jean Addison, Councillor Wendy Brackenbury, Councillor Robin Carter, Councillor Melanie Coleman, Councillor Emily Fedorowycz, Councillor Matt Keane, Councillor Graham Lawman, Councillor Paul Marks, Councillor Dorothy Maxwell, Councillor Michael Tye and Vacancy.
(Substitutes: Cllrs Allebone, Armour, Bell, Bone, Buckingham, Dearing, Dell, Ekins, Irwin, Pandey, Powell, Watt and one vacancy.)

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Items for discussion			
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05	Social Media Toolkit for Councillors	Kamila Coulson-Patel	29 - 40
06	Proposed Revisions to the Constitution	Sanjit Sull/Ben Smith	41 - 54
07	Close of meeting		
<p>Sanjit Sull, Monitoring Officer North Northamptonshire Council</p> <p> Proper Officer Friday 5 April 2024</p>			

This agenda has been published by Democratic Services.

Committee Administrator: Carol Mundy

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ITEM	NARRATIVE	DEADLINE
Members of the public and councillor agenda statements	Requests to address the committee must be received by 5pm two working days before the meeting.	5pm Wednesday 10 April 2024

If you wish to register to speak, please contact the committee administrator as detailed above.

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Members' Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded of their duty to ensure they abide by the approved Member Code of Conduct whilst undertaking their role as a Councillor. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **relates to** a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, you must declare the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless granted a dispensation.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which **relates to** other Registerable Interests, you must declare the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but must not take part in any vote on the matter unless you have been granted a dispensation.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which **relates to** your own financial interest (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest) or **relates to** a financial interest of a relative, friend or close associate, you must disclose the interest and not vote on the matter unless granted a dispensation. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting.

Members are reminded that they should continue to adhere to the Council's approved rules and protocols during the conduct of meetings. These are contained in the Council's approved Constitution.

If Members have any queries as to whether a Declaration of Interest should be made please contact the Monitoring Officer at – monitoringofficer@northnorthants.gov.uk

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Agenda Item 2



Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at 7pm on Monday 8th January, 2024 at the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, Corby, Northants, NN17 1AG

Present: -

Councillor Andy Mercer (Chair)
Councillor Jean Addison
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury
Councillor Robin Carter
Councillor Melanie Coleman
Councillor Emily Fedorowycz

Councillor Matt Keane
Councillor Paul Marks
Councillor Dorothy Maxwell
Councillor Graham Lawman

Officers:

Adele Wylie, Executive Director Customer and Governance
Kamila Coulson-Patel, Chief Lawyer
Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer (Committees/Members)
Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Support Officer

The chair welcomed members and the viewing public to the meeting.

A minute's silence was held in memory of Councillor Michael Tebbutt who had recently passed away.

76 Apologies for absence

Resolved to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jelley and Tye.

77 Members' Declarations of Interest (if any)

The chair invited those who wished to do so to make a declaration of interest.

Resolved to note that no declarations were made.

78 Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 were received.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 be approved as an accurate record thereof.

79 Proposed Revisions to the Constitution - Audit and Governance Committee Terms of Reference

The circulated report of the Chief Lawyer, Kamila Coulson-Patel, was received to update the committee on proposed revisions to the Terms of Reference for the Audit and Governance Committee.

Updates to the Terms of Reference needed to reflect the current CIFPA guidance on local arrangements. These updates had been considered by the Constitutional

Working Group and had been recommended to be presented to this committee for consideration prior to being presented to council for approval.

The following were appended to the report:

- Appendix A Proposed revisions to the Audit and Governance Committee Terms of Reference;
- Appendix B Table of Changes.

Members asked if the chair of the Audit and Governance Committee had been made aware of the proposals. It was confirmed that he was aware and was supportive of the changes.

Members also asked if, in relation to internal audit, additional work could be carried out if necessary. The monitoring officer responded and confirmed that the work plan contained additional days that could be allocated if required, as well as the option for consultancy days.

It was proposed by the chair and seconded by Councillor Marks that the recommendations in the report be approved. On being put to the vote this was declared carried.

Resolved that:

- (i) the proposed revisions to the Terms of Reference for the Audit and Governance Committee be noted;
- (ii) it be **Recommended** to the Council meeting on 25 January 2024 that the revised Terms of Reference for the Audit and Governance Committee be approved.

80 **Local Government Association - Civility in public life - Debate Not Hate Campaign**

The circulated report of the Chief Lawyer was received to update and inform members of the committee of the Local Government Association's 'Debate Not Hate': The impact of Abuse of Local Democracy' report and campaign.

Appended to the report was a copy of the LGA's report which summarised the findings.

Mrs Coulson-Patel presented her report and informed committee that in 2021, the LGA had launched a 'Call for Evidence on Abuse and Intimidation of Councillors', as part of the civility in public life programme.

The findings were used to produce a report and a campaign calling for support from councillors, MPs and organisations to sign the public statement to show support for the 'Debate Not Hate' campaign.

The report of the Chief Lawyer, detailed the findings, themes and a series of recommendations produced by the LGA. It also detailed the local picture referring to recommendation seven, requesting councillors to sign a public statement.

Members discussed the report and considered that this was a very important campaign. They shared their personal experiences and concerns around their accessibility, and that of their families, to the public with concern around home addresses being available, photographs and personal information, whilst accepting that there was a need to publicise their roles and the work they did.

Other comments related to the public perception of a councillor, who would always work in the best interest of their constituent, as there appeared to be a trust and respect issue, which members felt was not fair and such perception needed to be improved.

Reference was made to the Seven Principles of Public Life, also known as the Nolan Principles, of Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership, which members took seriously.

Comments were also made that in some cases, particularly at council meetings, that behaviour of some councillors could be poor, sometimes due to passionate debate. The member code of conduct needed to be adhered to and further training could be provided on this.

Some threats could be serious and intimidating and some members considered that when complaints were made to the police, little was done. There was also an issue with so called 'keyboard warriors' who would post untrue and harmful accusations on social media, often in ignorance of what was being dealt with or discussed and how such intimidation could affect a councillor's decision-making.

Members also raised issues over additional security and the need for 'on call' contact details of officers, who they could ring if they felt they were in danger at a given time and asked if they could have a list of addresses where they should not attend alone. It was also suggested that a generic telephone number be provided for each ward with the caller then pressing a number to get through to one of the ward councillors and that this should *not* be a link to a private phone number and that members should potentially be issued with council phones.

Reference was also made to the safety of town and parish clerks who were not employed by NNC. This is something that would be raised at a future forum.

The chief lawyer and monitoring officer noted the comments made and points of concern raised and stressed that if anyone was in immediate danger, they should always call the Police immediately and not contact council officers. Where possible it was also advisable to visit with a fellow ward councillor and let someone know where they were going and the expected return time.

It was proposed by Councillor Lawman that the wording of the recommendation be slightly amended to read as follows:

3.1.2.2 'To commit *and accept* the following:' and that at point a) the following be added 'To support the 'Debate Not Hate' campaign *and accept the LGA's recommendations, in principle*'.

This was seconded by Councillor Coleman and on being put to the vote approved.

The recommendation within the report, with the addition of the above, was put to the vote and declared carried.

Resolved that:

- (i) The work of the Local Government Association (LGA) on the Debate not Hate Campaign be noted, and that future updates be provided by the monitoring officer on the campaign and civility in public life programme;
- (ii) It be **Recommended** to the council meeting on 25 January 2024, that the Leader of the Council signs the Debate Not Hate Public Statement on behalf of the council and commit and accept the following:
 - To support the ‘Debate Not Hate’ campaign and accept the recommendations in principal;
 - To work together, across the political groups to promote and uphold high standards of civil behaviour in public and political debate;
 - To establish a reporting mechanism to record and monitor incidents of harassment and abuse;
 - To work with officers to ensure that support is provided to councillors who are experiencing intimidation and abuse;
 - the Democracy and Standards Committee to review this on an annual basis and work with the monitoring officer to address and challenge ongoing issues and key concerns.

81 Code of Conduct - National Learning Case Studies

The circulated report of the chief lawyer was received to inform the committee of the national picture on standards issues affecting local government.

Appended to the report was the speech of Lord Evans, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, who delivered the speech to the Institute for Government to mark the end of his term of office. The speech referred to the Committee on Standards in Public Life’s previous report on Local Government Ethical Standards in 2019.

Reference within the report to standards issues were made in relation to Birmingham City Council and the Section 114 notice issued by the Chief Financial Officer and the investigation undertaken and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority - Dr Nik Johnson.

Following three complaints against him between October 2021 and May 2022 under a breach of Schedule 12A Paragraph 1 and 2 of the LGA 1972. Details of the investigation were contained within the report along with recommendations.

Members discussed the report and considered that often members needed to be provided with more information to ensure openness and transparency. Additional training about confidentiality would also be helpful. There was also genuine concern over what could and could not be said in public debate for fear of offending and that this would cause problems.

The chief lawyer confirmed that there would be member training included in the induction process on all these subjects.

Resolved that:

- (i) It be noted that officers will continue to monitor the progress of matters referred to within the report and update the committee accordingly;
- (ii) No further recommendations were required at the present time.

82 Councillors' Code of Conduct Statistics

The circulated report of the chief lawyer was received to provide an update on the standards of conduct of members and co-opted members of the council, parish and town councils for the period 2023/24.

The report detailed the current position on the number of councillor code of conduct complaints received, dealt with and the resolutions achieved and the responsibility of the committee. The process of how each complaint was dealt with was also provided within the report.

Members asked about the complaint '5-18' regarding an issue with a NNC Councillor. The chief lawyer explained that following complaints received about a discriminatory post made by a councillor. Following the investigation, the conclusion of the recommendation, also agreed by the independent person, was that the councillor remove the post, attend Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training and make a public apology. These sanctions were adhered to and the matter closed.

Some members considered that this had put the council into disrepute, with a lot of hurt towards fellow members, officers and the public.

Members also asked about how the Independent Persons were appointed.

The chief lawyer explained that the council had three, who had previously worked with some of the legacy councils. They were appointed by committee and received training on standards issues from the monitoring officer and by external trainers.

Resolved that:

- (i) the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Councillors' Code of Conduct be noted;
- (ii) further data, in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with in respect of the Code of Conduct, be provided to the committee on a six-monthly basis.

83 Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Chair

Date.....

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Democracy and Standards Committee

February 2024

Report Title	Start time of Full Council meetings
Report Author	Sanjit Sull (Director of Law and Governance / Monitoring Officer) Sanjit.sull@northnorthants.gov.uk

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A

List of Appendices

- Appendix A – Recorded Apologies, Meeting Duration and level of Public Participation
- Appendix B – YouTube Views
- Appendix C – Details of Full Council meeting start times from other comparable Unitary Councils
- Appendix D – Results of the survey to Councillors.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To consider and determine the start time of full Council meetings and recommend to full Council.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Council considered the start time for full Council meetings at its meeting of 24 November 2022 and resolved to start meetings at 6pm. Prior to this change the start time of full Council meetings was 2pm.
- 2.2. The start time for full Council meetings is a matter of local choice. It is acknowledged that whatever start time is chosen there may be apologies submitted for each meeting due to a range of circumstances and factors.
- 2.3. The appendices attached to the report provide some data associated with attendance and participation at full Council meetings.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the Democracy and Standards Committee review the start time of full Council meetings (with the exception of the Budget meeting) and recommend to full Council the start time for meetings.
- 3.2. *Reason for Recommendations – the Council has trialled afternoon and evening start times for full Council meetings since 1 April 2021. Having done so it is prudent to review the effectiveness and efficiency of meetings during this period and report back to full Council so that a start time can be settled on.*
- 3.3. *Alternative Options Considered – the start time of full Council meetings is a matter of local choice for Council.*

4. Report Background

- 4.1. From 1 April 2021 full Council meetings were held at 7pm. Full Council agreed at its meeting 29th September 2021 to trial an alternative start time for ordinary full Council meetings, moving from 7:00 pm to 2:00 pm start. At its meeting of 24 November 2022 full Council reviewed the trial and resolved to approve a start time for ordinary full Council meetings of 6pm.
- 4.2. Full Council has since vesting day held meetings starting at 2pm, 6pm and 7pm. A reasonable number of full Council meetings have therefore been held at alternative start times and it is prudent having done so to review the efficiency and effectiveness of the meetings at the different times.
- 4.3. There have been four meetings of the Full Council held whilst the standardised start time has been 7.00pm. Of these four meetings –
- (i) 1 x Annual Council (commencing at 7:00 pm, public participation prohibited);
 - (ii) 1 x Special Full Council (commencing at 7:00 pm, exempt business only); and
 - (iii) 2 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 7:00 pm).

Of the two ordinary meetings Councillors will note:

- (iv) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting
- 0
- (v) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine;
- 1
- (vi) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine.
- 1

4.4. There have been nine meetings of the Full Council held whilst the standardised start time has been 2.00pm. Of these nine meetings –

- (i) 1 x Special Full Council (exempt business only commencing at 7:00 pm);
- (ii) 1 x Budget Full Council (commencing at 10:00 am)
- (iii) 1 x Annual Council (commencing at 2:00 pm, public participation prohibited); and
- (iv) 6 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 2:00 pm).

Of the six ordinary meetings Councillors will note:

- (v) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting
- 0
- (vi) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine;
- 2
- (vii) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine.
- 4

4.5. There have been 11 meetings of the Full Council held whilst the standardized start time has been 6.00pm. Of these 11 meetings –

- (i) 2 x Budget Full Council (commencing at 10:00 am)
- (ii) 1 x Annual Council (commencing at 6:00 pm, public participation prohibited); and
- (iii) 7 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 6:00 pm).
- (iv) 1 x extraordinary Full Council (commencing at 6:00pm).

Of the seven ordinary meetings Councillors will note:

- (v) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting
- 2
- (vi) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine;
- 2
- (vii) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine.
- 5

4.6. Whilst agreeing to trial different start times for ordinary meetings, full Council recognised the need to treat the Budget Full Council meeting as an exception given the business to be discussed at that meeting and resolved to commence this meeting at 10:00am.

5. Issues and Choices

5.1. The decision as to what time meetings of the ordinary full Council commence is a matter for Councillors. Whilst traditionally at local borough and district council level full Council meetings commence in the early evening, at county council level they are normally daytime meetings.

5.2. In making its decision full Council should consider a variety of factors given the differing work and personal factors for each individual Councillor and attendee. In determining what may be considered the most favourable option, Council may wish to consider the following factors –

- Amount of business likely to be discussed at full Council meetings. The Council as a significant unitary authority has a significant number of decisions for consideration by full Council, it is important that there is therefore sufficient time for consideration of reports and motions.
- Ability for effective and considered decision making.
- Health and safety. Tiredness can negatively impact Councillors in making decisions at meetings particularly where the agenda consists of several complex reports.
- Level of Councillor attendance.
- Ability for Councillors to attend.
- Level of public participation and interaction in person.
- Ability to receive public participation via online link.
- Ability for the public to attend in person i.e. access to public transport.
- Ability for the public to view via the Council's YouTube channel.
- Resource implications i.e. officer time.
- Availability of venue.
- Travel time to venue i.e. distance, health & safety issues.

5.3. Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of statistics to assist councillors in determining the above factors. For ordinary meetings of Council, the statistics can be summarised as follows:-

(viii) Average duration of full Council meetings since May 2021;

Total Average Ordinary Meeting Duration	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 2.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 6.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 7.00pm
3 hours 15 mins (3.24)	3 hours 10 mins (3.16)	3 hours 12 mins (3.20)	3 hours 37 mins (3.61)

- (ix) The recorded number of apologies submitted for each meeting;

Total Average Number of Cllrs Present at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
60	58	61	62

Total Average Number of Cllrs Not Present	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
18	20	16	16

- (x) The number of direct public interactions inc. public giving statements, public asking questions and public presenting petitions;

Total Average Number of Public Participating at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
2.5	0.5	3.0	6.5

- (xi) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting;

Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
0	2	0

- (xii) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine;

Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
2	2	1

- (xiii) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine.

Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
4	5	1

5.4. Budget Council meetings are particularly lengthy given the business to be discussed. Full Council has previously agreed that for the Budget meeting a

start time of 10:00 am is preferred. This allows for a clearly defined lunch break.

5.5. Apologies are recorded in the minutes for each respective meeting. There is no requirement for a Councillor to record “why” they are absent from a meeting, or the reason recorded. Officers can confirm that the reasons given vary and include holiday, sickness (inc. Covid), work, family celebrations, etc.

5.6. Appendix B details interactions with regard to views on YouTube. Eighteen of the full Council meetings have been live streamed onto YouTube. They have been streamed onto the main NNC YouTube account or the Democratic Services account. Councillors will note that the installation of the new AV equipment in the Council Chamber has allowed for the continued live streaming of full Council meetings going forward.

Avg. YouTube Views at 10.00am	Avg. YouTube Views at 2.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 6.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 7.00pm
626	303	426	N/A

Total Average Number of YouTube Views	Avg. YouTube Views Daytime	Avg. YouTube Views Evening (6.00pm onwards)
425	411	426

5.7. To assist Councillors in considering what start time is preferable, Appendix C provides some comparators based on similar unitary authorities, i.e those formed after 1998. Councillors will note there are a range of start times which reflects the need for local circumstances to be taken into account.

5.8. It should be noted that based on the benchmarking group only, of the 17 comparator authorities, 71% commence their meetings during daytime (9.00am-6.00pm) and 29% during the evening (6.00pm onwards).

5.9. The Constitutional Working Group (CWG) when considering this matter requested that officers prepare an e-survey to be sent to all Councillors. The results from the e-survey have been collated and are reported to the Democracy and Standards Committee at this meeting. Responses are anonymised. The outcome of this survey is attached as Appendix D and is summarised below, 60 councillors having responded.

Councillor Preferred Start time of 10.00am	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 2.00pm	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 6.00pm
8 cllrs (13%)	19 cllrs (32%)	33 cllrs (55%)

Councillor Preferred Start time of Daytime	Councillor Preferred Start Time of Evening
27 cllrs (45%)	33 cllrs (55%)

6. Next Steps

6.1. Council is requested to consider the options available and determine the recommendation or determine an alternative start time.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1. Currently all ordinary full Council meetings are scheduled in the Municipal Timetable for a 6:00 pm start however, if the final decision is to move to morning or afternoon meetings this can currently be accommodated with regard to staffing and venue.
- 7.1.2. There are resource implications associated with evening meetings as staff accrue time off in lieu (TOIL) which can put pressure on service delivery given the limited resources in the Democratic Services team.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. The start time for Council meeting is not prescribed by statute, therefore it is a matter of local choice.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1. When agreed the Council's Constitution will be updated including on the website. Whilst the municipal calendar and diary appointments have been issued for 2024/25 for a 6:00 pm start time these can be amended if required.

7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1. From a governance perspective it is important that full Council meetings are quorate and that as many councillors are able to attend as possible. There will always be occasions, whatever start time is determined, when some Councillors will be unable to attend. Account should be taken that working patterns have changed since the pandemic with more

organisations adopting hybrid working, traditional office hours are not applicable in a way that they were previously. Furthermore, there are sectors for example hospitality, health etc where shift patterns dictate working patterns.

7.4.2. It is important for Councillors, officers and the public that there is some certainty around the date and time of full Council meetings, in order that the Council's business can be conducted in an efficient, effective and timely manner.

7.4.3. Health & safety issues are also a consideration. As a unitary council, Councillors are responsible for decisions across all functions of local government for the administrative area of North Northamptonshire. Tiredness can negatively impact Councillors in making decisions at meetings particularly where the agenda consists of several complex reports. Furthermore, some Councillors may have significant commutes to work and then onto council meetings, tiredness when driving may also have negative impacts on the wellbeing of Councillors, especially at nighttime.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. The Constitutional Working Group (CWG) considered this matter at its meeting on 4th March 2024. The Group suggested a survey be distributed to all 77 Councillors. The outcome of this survey is detailed in Appendix D and has been reported to the Democracy and Standards Committee.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. Not applicable to this report.

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

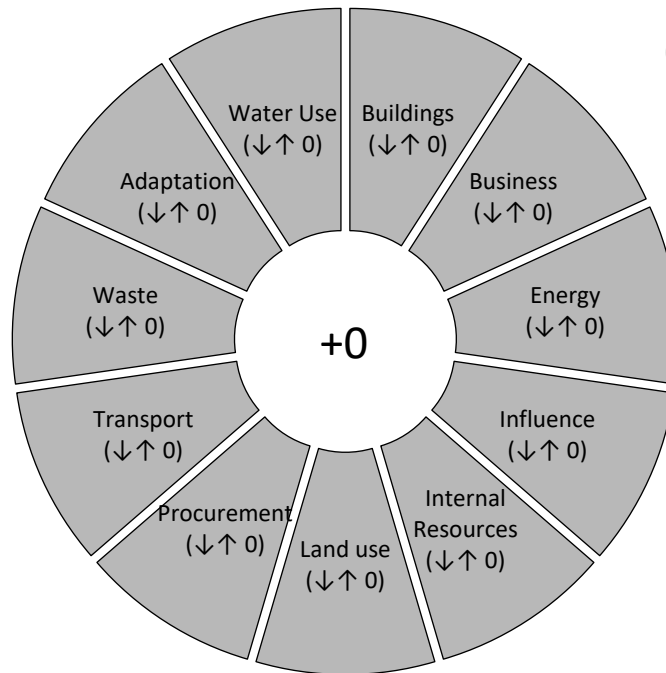
7.7.1. Not applicable to this report.

7.8. Equality Implications

7.8.1. None impacting on the nine protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

7.9. Climate Impact

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North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 8 mos away.

7.9.1. As there is not a specific recommendation in this report there are no climate impacts specifically to this report. However, in terms of the range of options available for meeting start times, travel to meetings outside of rush hour is likely to be more beneficial in terms of reduced car emissions and daytime meetings provide a greater range of opportunity to use public transport.

7.10. Community Impact

7.10.1. The public's right to attend full Council meetings for public agenda items are enshrined in statute. The Public Participation rules are included in the Council's Constitution.

7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1. Not applicable to this report.

8. Background Papers

8.1. [NNC Council Constitution](#)

Appendix A – Councillors Present, Meeting Duration, and Level of Public Participation

Date	Time	Type	Duration (Hours)	Total Cllrs	Present	Apologies/ Absent	Public Participation	Business Concluded before guillotine		Agenda Items Carried Forward to Next Meeting
								Yes	No	
26.05.2021	7.00pm	Annual	1.75	78	75	3	N/A	X		
29.06.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	1.78	78	70	8	N/A	X		
28.07.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	4.01	78	57	21	9		X	
29.09.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	3.20	78	67	11	4	X		
01.12.2021	2.00pm	Ordinary	4.22	78	54	24	0		X	
09.12.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	1.82	78	55	23	N/A	X		
24.02.2022	10.00am	Budget	6.47	77	63	14	1		X	
31.03.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	4.92	77	63	14	1	X		
26.05.2022	2.00pm	Annual	1.28	78	66	12	N/A	X		
23.06.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	2.92	78	58	20	1		X	
28.07.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	2.00	78	58	20	1	X		
29.09.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	1.87	78	53	25	0		X	
24.11.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	3.03	78	62	16	0		X	
26.01.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	3.52	76	61	15	1		X	
23.02.2023	10.00am	Budget	5.32	77	63	14	5	X		
30.03.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	4.68	77	64	13	7		X	
25.05.2023	6.00pm	Annual	1.35	77	69	8	N/A	X		
22.06.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	3.88	78	54	24	5		X	
31.08.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.98	78	63	15	2		X	1
26.10.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.93	78	62	16	1		X	1
07.12.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.20	78	62	16	2	X		
25.01.2024	6.00pm	Extraordinary	0.93	77	51	26	N/A	X		
22.02.2024	10.00am	Budget	5.85	77	57	20	1		X	
07.03.2024	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.23	77	63	14	3	X		
TOTAL								12	12	2

Statistical Averages of Ordinary Meetings Only

Total Average Ordinary Meeting Duration	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 2.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 6.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 7.00pm
3.24	3.16	3.20	3.61

Total Average Number of Cllrs Present at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
60	58	61	62

Total Average Number of Cllrs Not Present	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
18	20	16	16

Total Average Number of Public Participating at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at 7.00pm
2.5	0.5	3.0	6.5

Statistical Averages of All Council Meetings

Total Average Meeting Duration	Avg. Meeting Duration at 10.00am	Avg. Meeting Duration at 2.00pm	Avg. Meeting Duration at 6.00pm	Avg. Meeting Duration at 7.00pm
3.13	5.88	3.16	2.74	2.70

Total Average Number of Cllrs Present	Avg. Cllrs Present at 10.00am	Avg. Cllrs Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Present at 6.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Present at 7.00pm
61	61	59	61	63

Total Average Number of Cllrs Not Present	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 10.00am	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 6.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 7.00pm
16	16	19	16	13

Total Average Number of Public Participating	Avg. Public Participating at 10.00am	Avg. Public Participating at 2.00pm	Avg. Public Participating at 6.00pm	Avg. Public Participating at 7.00pm
2.4	2.3	0.5	3	6.5

Appendix B – YouTube Views

Date	Time	Type	Total YouTube Views
26.05.2021	7.00pm	Annual	N/A
29.06.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	N/A
28.07.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	N/A
29.09.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	N/A
01.12.2021	2.00pm	Ordinary	N/A
09.12.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	N/A
24.02.2022	10.00am	Budget	688
31.03.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	255
26.05.2022	2.00pm	Annual	203
23.06.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	405
28.07.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	229
29.09.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	331
24.11.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	393
26.01.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	456
23.02.2023	10.00am	Budget	772
30.03.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	735
25.05.2023	6.00pm	Annual	318
26.06.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	988
31.08.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	358
26.10.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	343
07.12.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	255
25.01.2024	6.00pm	Extraordinary	169
22.02.2024	10.00am	Budget	419
07.03.2024	6.00pm	Ordinary	208

Total Average Number of Youtube Views	Avg. YouTube Views at 10.00am	Avg. YouTube Views at 2.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 6.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 7.00pm
418	626	303	426	N/A

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Appendix C –Full Council Start Times of Other Unitary Authorities Created after 1998

Unitary Authority	Start Time	Daytime (9.00-6.00pm)	Evening (6.00pm onwards)
Bedford	6.30pm		X
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	7.00pm		X
Buckinghamshire	4.00pm	X	
Central Bedfordshire	6.30pm		X
Cheshire East	11.00am	X	
Cheshire West and Chester	6.30pm		X
Cornwall	10.30am	X	
Cumberland	1.00pm	X	
County Durham	10.00am	X	
Dorset	6.30pm		X
North Yorkshire	10.30am	X	
Northumberland	2.00pm	X	
Shropshire	10.00am	X	
Somerset	2.00pm	X	
West Northamptonshire	5.00pm	X	
Westmorland and Furness	1.30pm	X	
Wiltshire	10.30am	X	
	Total	12	5
	Percentage	71%	29%

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Appendix D – Councillor Survey Results

Between 20th March and 3rd April 2024, councillors were surveyed as to their most preferred ordinary council meeting start time. They were also invited to make any specific comments.

60 of 77 councillors (78%) responded to the survey, with the following results and anonymised summary of responses being detailed below:-



Councillor Preferred Start time of 10.00am	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 2.00pm	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 6.00pm
8 cllrs (13%)	19 cllrs (32%)	33 cllrs (55%)

Councillor Preferred Start time of Daytime	Councillor Preferred Start Time of Evening
27 cllrs (45%)	33 cllrs (55%)

Summarised Version of Anonymised Comments Made

a) Councillors in favour of 10.00am start time

- Easier to travel to and from meetings during the daytime including driving and use of public transport for both councillors and officers;
- Helpful for school runs;
- Earlier in the day allows for proper debate and less need to guillotine the meeting as there is still time in the day;
- A 6.00pm start allows little time for those at work to attend and refresh themselves, or to have time for an evening meal until late at night;
- Given the advance notice of the meeting dates, councillors should be able to make themselves available as appropriate;
- Length of working day for officers;
- Concern at quality of decision making in evening meetings following a full day at work.

b) Councillors in favour of 2.00pm start time

- The theory that evening meetings would mean substantially more public involvement has been tested and not been proven;
- A 2pm start, or even a 10am start would mean all business could be completed without the need for very late finishes, which may be more dangerous for drivers due to tiredness;
- Daytime meetings should be able to be accommodated by employers, and if not, there are only about 7 per annum;
- 6:00pm still interrupts a working day (so requires councillors to take time off), plus it requires commuting at the busiest of times;
- 2:00pm means working councillors only have to take a half day off work, the commute is during quieter periods, and officers can attend during their normal working hours;
- Evenings cause problems due to allowing extra time for rush hour traffic and not having a chance to eat in the evening;
- Officers would not have to work late, all attendees' welfare should be considered;
- The journey is unlit for much of the winter time and is dangerous leaving at 10pm.

c) Councillors in favour of 6.00pm start time

- Day time meetings are difficult for councillors who work or have carer's duties to attend;
- Daytime meetings exclude too many members across parties as people have to work. If we want true representation from all parts of the community it is important to make meeting at times for the majority;
- Councillors and members of the public from the working class would be impacted as these jobs are often less flexible in terms of time off;
- Evening meetings enable residents to attend and observe democracy in action;
- The public are able to be present in person more easily as it is not within usual working hours, so has improved public engagement;
- Evening meeting are more accessible for Members with work commitments;
- Childcare commitments during the day could affect the ability of younger people to become councillors, which would only be possible if evening meetings were the norm.

d) Other comments made

- During the autumn/winter months meetings could held in the afternoon and in the spring/summer in the evening;
- Any change should be made at the beginning of any new term, so that candidates understand what is expected.

Democracy and Standards Committee

Monday 15th April 2024

Report Title	Social Media Toolkit for Councillors
Report Author	Kamila Coulson-Patel, Chief Lawyer

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	Choose an item.
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? <u>Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)</u>	Modern public services

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Social Media Toolkit

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To consider a draft social media toolkit to support councillors to use social media safely.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Councillors have reported concerns regarding abuse and threats received on social media.
- 2.2. A social media toolkit has been prepared to support councillors to use social media safely which covers health and safety and how to deal with abusive behaviour on social media. The toolkit also covers considerations linked to the Councillor Code of Conduct. A copy of the text for the social media toolkit is shown at Appendix A.
- 2.3. Subject to agreement by Democracy and Standards Committee, the monitoring officer will arrange for the text to be presented as an interactive toolkit available to all councillors. It will also form part of the councillor induction programme.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- (a) Review and comment on the draft social media toolkit;
- (b) Agree the adoption of the social media toolkit for North Northamptonshire Council and direct the monitoring officer to make arrangements for this to be digitalised and available to all councillors and form part of the induction programme;
- (c) Review the social media toolkit in 12 months forming part of the work programme of the committee for 2025/26.

3.1.1 Reason for Recommendations:

- Members at both Democracy and Standards Committee and at full Council have highlighted the challenges faced by councillors on social media for their concerns regarding safety.
- The recommendation to adopt a social media toolkit assists in supporting councillors in the discharge of their role and provides guidance on how to navigate the online landscape when acting in their official capacity.
- It is recommended that this forms part of the updates to councillors through communication and form part of the induction to ensure that all councillors have an awareness of how to navigate social media in their official capacity and further guidance and resources available to them.

3.1.2 Alternative Options Considered:

- An option considered was to not create a social media toolkit. This was disregarded as members have previously highlighted the challenges faced on social media and the need for support on this topic.
- The option of signposting only to the Local Government Association Guidance was considered. Whilst this Local Government Association guidance is a very helpful tool, the adoption of this would not allow local revisions to reflect the arrangements at North Northamptonshire and therefore this option is not proposed.

4. Report Background

- 4.1. On 8th January 2024, the Democracy and Standards Committee considered the debate not hate campaign of the LGA and recommended its approval by full Council which took place on 25th January 2024.
- 4.2. Arising from the adoption of the debate not hate campaign, the monitoring officer has worked to develop a social media toolkit to support councillors when using social media.
- 4.3. Whilst councillors hold public office and will be subject to higher levels of scrutiny and challenge, this should not amount to criticism personal in nature including threats to personal safety.
- 4.4. Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee on 8th January 2024 gave their own accounts of the public threats they have been subject to on social media. It was recognised that as holders of public office they are subject to scrutiny and challenge which is part of healthy democracy however they were able to express instances where this was without basis and became a personal attack including through social media.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. A draft social media toolkit has been prepared which is shown at Appendix A. This is intended to equip councillors with guidance to navigate social media platforms.
- 5.2. The toolkit covers general and specific consideration, use of social media at meetings, Councillor Code of Conduct and how to deal with online abusive behaviour. The draft toolkit which has been developed through the best practice and guidance produced by Local Government Association (LGA).

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Subject to approval by the Democracy and Standards Committee, the monitoring officer will arrange for the social media toolkit to be digitalised and available to all councillors.
- 6.2. The toolkit will also form part of the councillor induction programme to support new and existing councillors in the discharge of their role.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1. There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. There is no legislative provision requiring the adoption of a social media toolkit however the council has a duty under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its councillors which this toolkit seeks to achieve.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. The proposal to adopt a social media toolkit aligns with the council in meeting its commitments in the Corporate Plan 2021/25 specifically for modern public services. Specially to empower councillors in the effective use of the technology available to them and provide them with skills and knowledge to navigate social media.

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

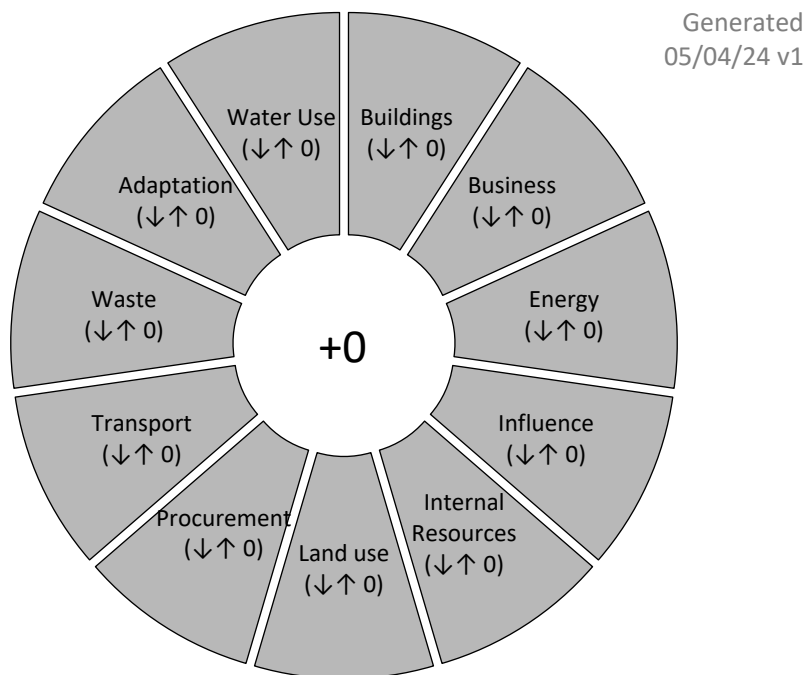
7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. The proposals arise from consultation on the debate not hate campaign considered by the Democracy and Standards Committee on 8th January 2024. There has been no direct consultation on the proposals to date.

7.6. Equality Implications

7.6.1. There are no equality implications arising from the proposal.

7.7. Climate Impact



North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 8 mos away.

7.7.1. There are no climate change impacts arising from this report.

7.8. Community Impact

7.8.1. There are no implications arising from this.

7.9. **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.9.1. There are no implications arising from this report.

Background Papers

7.10. None.

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Appendix A - NNC Social Media Tool Kit

1. Purpose of this guidance

Social media can be instrumental in promoting your work to a larger audience and facilitating conversation and engagement with residents, businesses, and the wider community. For these reasons the increase in Councillor's use of social media is welcomed. However, there is a wide recognition that the use of social media comes with potential issues. To support and facilitate the use of social media this guidance has been produced.

This guidance lays out a summary of the principal issues for Councillor's consideration, some 'Do's and Don'ts', and further information about the legal framework and examples of how social media activity may fall within the scope of the Councillor's Code of Conduct. Also covered are some tips on best practice when tackling online abuse and engaging in healthy debate.

2. Considerations when using social media.

Like anyone else publishing material, Councillors need to be aware of the laws that apply to published material. Some of the main ones are as follows:

- i) Defamation/Libel. If you publish an untrue statement about a person which causes or is likely to cause serious harm to their reputation, they may take a libel action against you. Actions in libel may also be commenced if, for example, someone else publishes something libellous on your website, you are aware of it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim could result in the award of damages against the Council, or possibly against you if you were acting in your personal capacity.
- ii) Copyright. Publishing information that is not yours, e.g., extracts from publications or photos, without first obtaining permission, is likely to breach copyright laws. Copyright material does not have to be marked ©, so just because a photo appears on a website without the photo, or the website being marked © this does not mean the photo can be freely used. Therefore, don't publish anything you are unsure about, or obtain prior permission in writing from the copyright owner. Again, a successful claim for breach of copyright would be likely to lead to an award of damages against the Council or possibly against you personally if you were acting in your personal capacity.
- iii) Data protection. Do not publish the personal data of others, including photographs, without their express permission to do so. Information which is an individual's personal data may also be confidential information, and again if you used this information in a way which was detrimental to the individual, they may be able to sue you or the Council for damages.

- iv) Harassment. It is an offence to repeatedly pursue a campaign against a person that is likely to cause alarm, harassment, or distress.
- v) Discrimination and protected characteristics. It is an offence to discriminate against anyone based on protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.
- vi) Incitement. It is an offence to incite any criminal act.
- vii) Malicious and obscene communications. It is an offence to send malicious and obscene communications.

3. Councillor specific considerations

Bias and pre-determination

Councillors sitting on regulatory committees such as planning or licensing should be aware that they are allowed to have a view but not have gone so far as to have predetermined their position on a matter. Any views aired on social media (including "liking" a comment made by others) could be used as evidence of making a decision in advance of hearing all relevant information. The Council's decision is then open to challenge and could be invalidated, and provisions of the Code of Conduct could be engaged.

Equality and discrimination

The Council is a public authority required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. It is an offence to discriminate against anyone based on their protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity). The Council must also have 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty (which consists of eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations) and that applies to Councillors when appearing to act in their official capacity.

Electioneering

Council resources, including the use of social media on Council mobile devices or IT equipment, should not be used for political/campaign purposes. Particular care should also be taken when using social media during the pre-election publicity period (the period between the notice of election and polling day). Councillors can continue to use their social media pages during the pre-election period and may use it for campaigning purposes, subject to the Electoral Commission's guidance on election campaigning. Councillors also need to be mindful that in using their Councillor social media page for these purposes may engage the Member Code of Conduct. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services issues guidance to all members on the pre-election publicity rules in advance of an election. The Electoral Commission has also published guidance including on the requirements to provide a return of expenditure on election advertising which includes web advertising.

Human rights

Article 8 of the European Convention provides that public authorities should not interfere with the right of individuals to a private and family life without lawful authority to do so, and where it is necessary, proportionate, and in pursuit of one of the aims set out in Article 8(2) which are national security, public safety, economic well-being, health or morals, prevention of crime or disorder, or protecting others' rights. Observing the use of social media by other people, even on 'open' profiles, can engage Article 8.

4. Abuse on social media and how to combat it

Unfortunately, anyone can find themselves subject to online abuse and there may be occasions where you find that others post inappropriate comments about you or communicate inappropriately with you through social media. Any intimidation or abuse on social media is subject to all the same potential criminal prosecutions as other forms of intimidation, with additional criminal offences relating specifically to electronic communications. If as a result of such communications you fear for the safety of yourself or others, you should immediately contact the Police just as you would in any other circumstance where you feel you or others may be in danger.

Every situation will be different, and it will need a personal judgement about whether it is worthwhile to pursue the incident, ignore it or politely acknowledge.

If you are subject to online abuse but are not overly concerned and intend to ignore it, consider keeping a record of the abuse should it escalate in future. You can do this by simply taking a screen shot of the abuse on your phone, tablet, or computer. You may also decide to inform the perpetrator that you are keeping a record of all messages, which may deter them from posting further comments or might encourage them to delete them.

For more bothersome and repeated online abuse, consider muting or blocking the perpetrator.

Muting allows you to remove an account's publications from your timeline but does not go as far as unfollowing or blocking the account. Muted accounts will not know that they have been muted and you can 'unmute' them at any time.

Blocking allows you to restrict specific accounts from contacting you, seeing your posts or following you. Unlike muting, the perpetrators can find out that they have been 'blocked' and may accuse you of avoiding their scrutiny; this may be a small price to pay if their behaviour is checked and can be easily rebutted if necessary.

5. Engaging in healthy debate

Councillors play an important role within the community and are regarded as influential in their local area. This means your actions, tone, manner, and language has a wide impact for many people.

Treat others in the way you would want to be treated – it is never pleasant to be on the receiving end of negative posts or abusive comments. As a Councillor it is your responsibility to ensure that the way in which you respond to others is polite and positive, encouraging healthy debate on both your own social media accounts and those of others. Be aware of the fact as a councillor, your behaviour will influence others' actions therefore it is your responsibility to ensure that the way in which you respond to others is polite and positive.

6. Using social media during committee meetings

Use of personal mobile devices at committee meetings should be kept to a minimum, be done discreetly and with consideration of the impression you are giving to others.

There may be times when Councillors exchange text messages or emails during meetings which are relevant to the debate at hand. These can be valuable exchanges; however, it is important for Councillors to be conscious not to give the impression that inadequate attention is being given to discussions of the meeting. If Councillors are considered to have come to a decision without having properly listened to the debate, then decision can be challenged. It may also result in Code of Conduct complaints being made against the distracted Councillor.

7. Code of Conduct

Councillors should be aware that when using social media, they are subject to the Council Code of Conduct at all times. For this reason, any social media accounts which could be potentially associated with a Councillor need to meet the standards of the Code of Conduct.

8. Tips on best practice whilst using social media

Do:

1. Set appropriate privacy settings for your social media and networking sites, especially if you have social media which is private and non-political. However, should you post an inappropriate comment or image on a private or restricted account which is then seen by a third party, you remain responsible for that content irrespective of the privacy settings you have in place.
2. Keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts from others to avoid the perception that you condone such views.
3. Be clear about the capacity in which you are publishing material. It is advisable to keep your personal profile and your elected member profile separate on social networking sites to ensure you maintain separate and appropriate professional boundaries. However, do be aware that the higher your profile as an elected member, the more likely it is that you will be considered to be acting in your professional capacity on social media.
4. Be aware that you will be considered to have acted in your professional capacity if you publish information that you could only have accessed by being an elected member.

5. Be mindful of using Council owned IT appropriately. If you use a council provided blog or IT equipment, any posts made are more likely to be viewed as being made in your professional capacity.
6. Minimise security risks by using strong passwords for your social media accounts and change them regularly. Protect your devices with a password or pin to control access and prevent misuse.
7. Show respect and consideration for others. Those who present a differing opinion to yours are a common element of social media and it's okay to agree to disagree. Use of social media's blocking and muting functions should only be used as a last resort.
8. Feel able and encouraged to publish political points, however, take caution in being too specific or personal when referring to individuals. An attack on an individual may be perceived as disrespectful, whereas general comments made about another party or legitimate comments on policy are less likely to be viewed as such. An unjustified personal and generic attack on a section of the public is unlikely to be considered a political view protected by freedom of speech.
9. Pause before publishing. Think about what you are publishing and the message it sends to those who see it.

Don't:

1. Make careless statements which could lead to potential liability or publish comments you would not be prepared to make on paper or face to face.
2. Use social media to attack, abuse, insult, defame or otherwise make negative or discriminatory comments about members of council, members of Parliament (or their family or friends), council staff, service users, other professionals, or the council.
3. Browse, download, upload, or distribute any material which could be considered offensive, inappropriate, defamatory, discriminatory or illegal.
4. Blog or publish in haste, especially in circumstances where your judgment may be impaired, e.g., when you have consumed alcohol.

Further information and guidance

1. LGA Handling abuse on social media.
2. LGA Social media dos and don'ts.
3. LGA Digital citizenship 'rules of engagement' infographics.
4. Connected Councillors: A guide to using social media to support local leadership and other guidance available on the Local Government Association website www.local.gov.uk
5. Terms and conditions for Facebook.
6. Terms and conditions for Twitter.

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Democracy and Standards Committee Monday 15 April 2024

Report Title	Proposed Revisions to the Constitution
Report Author	Sanjit Sull, Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Modern Public Services

List of Appendices

Appendix A - Proposed revisions to the planning committee's terms of reference.
Appendix B - Table of other constitutional changes.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To update the committee on proposed revisions to the planning committee structure and associated terms of reference and other minor constitutional changes.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The current planning committee structure and terms of reference have been in place since May 2023.

- 2.2 In light of recent experience and review, it is being recommended that the Area Planning Committees North and South be combined into one planning committee for the whole of North Northamptonshire.
- 2.3 On 4 March 2024, the Constitutional Working Group considered some proposed minor changes to the constitution, which are presented to this meeting for noting and approval as necessary.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:
- a) Review and comment on the proposed terms of reference for a single planning committee at appendix A to this report; and
 - b) Note and approve (where necessary) the changes to the constitution outlined at appendix B.
- 3.2 Reason for Recommendation – The proposed planning changes are recommended to ensure the effective discharge of the council’s planning function that maximises efficiency and cost effectiveness from a harmonised service.
- The changes to the constitution are part of its regular review as a key living document of the council.
- 3.3 Alternative Options Considered – An alternative option for the planning committee function would be to retain two area planning committees, however a single planning committee, as operated by a number of other high-performing unitary authorities is considered the preferred model.
- The option of presenting the revisions as part of the programmed review of the wider Constitution at a later date this year was rejected as this would disrupt the delivery of the work of the planning service and general functioning of the Council.

4. Report Background

Planning Committee Structure

- 4.1 In the last week of September 2022, a peer review of the council’s planning service was undertaken by a Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Peer Review Team. This included an extensive set of interviews and focus groups with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders.
- 4.2 The details and outcomes of the peer review are set out in a PAS report which was provided to the council and considered by the

Executive on the 23 December 2022. A copy of the PAS report can be found here: [Planning Advisory Service Peer Review Report](#).

- 4.3 The peer review report set out a series of recommendations for the planning service that were designed to help it through the current transformation journey, bringing together five legacy local planning authorities under North Northamptonshire Council to form a single harmonised and high-performing planning service for North Northamptonshire.
- 4.4 In response to the Peer Review, the council is undertaking an action plan that seeks to harness the advice and recommendations received and to plan a detailed programme of transformational activity and governance arrangements that will oversee the progress of this work.
- 4.5 The action plan and governance arrangements, including the formation of a Planning Transformation Board, were considered and approved by Executive on the 22 December 2022.
- 4.6 With regard to the council's planning committee structure, full council on 30th March 2023, following a review by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), approved the abolition of the authority wide strategic area planning committee and four area planning committees based on the sovereign council planning authority areas, to that of two area planning committees that each also encompass the responsibilities of the previous strategic planning committee.
- 4.7 The revised planning committee structure was formally established in May 2023. Officers have reviewed the revised structure and how it is working. Councillors are advised that the number of applications being brought forward alongside the number of cancelled meetings suggests that it is expedient to move to a single committee. The benefits of moving to a single committee include:
 - i. Consistency – a single committee supports consistent decision making and develops members of the committee as experts;
 - ii. Holistic (one council) approach – a single committee supports a broader understanding of planning applications across the whole administrative area of NNC;
 - iii. Cost – a single committee provides efficiency savings;
 - iv. Accessibility – it is proposed that meetings of the committee take place at the Cube so that they may be live streamed using the specialist AV equipment available. This is not presently possible for the South planning committee.
- 4.8 Research was undertaken as part of the review of the authority's planning structure in 2023 which examined some seven high-performing unitary planning authorities. The outcome of this work was reported to Democracy and Standards Committee on 13 March 2023 which showed that:
 - Six of the seven authorities operate a structure with a single planning committee meeting monthly

- One authority operates a planning committee with two sub-committees (however 33% of its planning committees in 2022 considered a single application)

4.9 It is proposed that the two current area committees therefore be combined into one committee to provide further efficiency and effectiveness for the planning service. For the planning service to be completely joined up, it would be better if there was one committee boundary coterminous to that of the actual authority area.

Other Constitutional Changes

4.10 A fundamental review of the constitution is currently being undertaken, for reporting back to the Democracy and Standards Committee later in 2024. However, it is also important that the constitution remains current and reflects the council's current structure and processes. Therefore, a number of minor changes are reported at Appendix B for the committee's information, which the Constitution Working Group has noted will be exercised by the monitoring officer using the delegated power to make minor administrative changes to the constitution.

4.11 In reviewing the changes, the Constitutional Working Group is also recommending for this committee's consideration a proposal to vary the current delegation to the monitoring officer to make consequential and minor amendments to the constitution, to provide for greater efficacy and compliance with the law. This proposed change is also contained in Appendix B.

5. Next Steps

5.1 The committee is requested to consider the revisions to the planning committee structure and terms of reference and the minor change to the monitoring officer's delegated power, for recommending approval to full council.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 The planning proposals are designed to improve the efficiency of the planning committee system. By reducing the number of committees and meetings held over the course of a year, there will be a corresponding financial saving in travel costs for staff and members of the committee, and an opportunity to close council office buildings earlier on more occasions (the proposals equate to 12 less evening committees per year).

6.2 Legal and Governance

6.2.1 The proposals will require amendments to the council's constitution in order to introduce the proposed changes to the planning committee structure.

6.2.2 In implementing these proposals, there will be a need to ensure that the council continues to operate a legally sound planning service and that all planning decisions are robust and able to withstand the potential for legal challenge.

6.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

6.3.1 These proposals will assist in delivering the actions as set out in the NNC Planning Action Plan, as agreed by the Executive on the 23 December 2022, designed to respond to the PAS Peer Review findings and recommendations.

6.3.2 The proposals will assist the council meeting its commitments in the Corporate Plan by contributing towards the Key Commitment of Modern Public Services – 'providing good quality and efficient services valued by our customers,' and 'using our assets, skills, knowledge and technology most effectively.'

6.4 Risk

6.4.1 Should the council choose not to progress the proposals in this report that responds further to the PAS recommendations, there is a risk that the council continues a sub optimal planning service that cannot fully meet the expectations of its customers and that fails to realise the efficiencies that can be delivered through transforming the function into a single, fully harmonised planning service.

6.5 Consultation

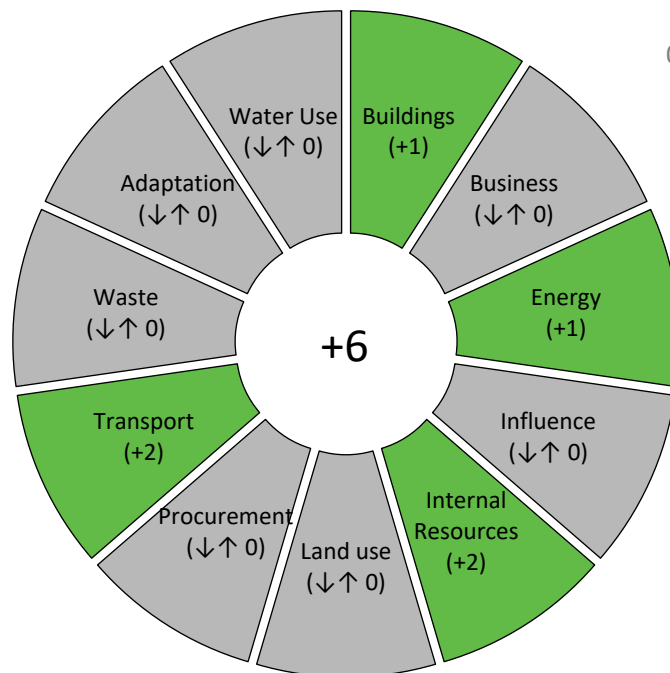
6.5.1 The Constitution Working Group were consulted on the proposed minor amendments to the constitution including the change to the monitoring officer's delegated power on 4 March 2024.

6.6 Equality Implications

6.6.1 None impacting on the nine protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

6.7 Climate Impact

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North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 8 mos away.

6.7.1 The council has an opportunity through the planning committee proposals to realise efficiencies that will have a positive climate and environment impact. A potential reduction in 12 evening meetings per year will reduce the requirement for both officers and committee members to travel to meetings and will enable council office buildings to be closed earlier on more occasions thus reducing energy demand.

6.8 Community Impact

6.9 The proposals seek to ensure that planning committee meetings remain accessible to members of the public. Whilst future planning meetings would only be held in Corby, this is a venue which benefits from state-of-the-art webcast facilities which allows the meetings to be viewed from any location both live and after the event. The current venue for Area Planning South does not have webcast facilities which reduces the public engagement available at Swanspool House.

6.10 Crime and Disorder Impact

6.10.1 None

7. Background Papers

7.1 [NNC Council Constitution](#)

7.2 [PAS Peer Review Report](#)

7.3 [Corresponding NNC Planning Transformation Board Action Plan](#)

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Part 4.3

Planning Committee

Planning Committee

The Council has established one Planning Committee.

The purpose of the Committee is to consider all planning applications not dealt with by officers using delegated powers.

These Rules detail the membership of the Committee and what the roles and responsibilities of the Committee are.

1. Membership

1.1. The Committee shall comprise 19 Councillors all of whom shall have undertaken relevant training.

1.2. The Committee shall be politically balanced.

2. Substitutions

2.1. Named substitutes. Substitutes must have completed relevant training.

2.2. Political groups may nominate their own members to the pool in accordance with the proportionalities in force at the time and may vary their nominees as and when required subject to the training requirements referred to.

3. Chairmanship

3.1. Term of office will be one year.

3.2. Annual Council shall appoint the Chair and Vice Chair of the committee.

3.3. Any in-year vacancies shall be elected/appointed by the committee at an ordinary meeting of the committee.

4. Quorum

4.1. The quorum shall be 7 voting members (including those acting as substitute members).

5. Terms of Reference

5.1. To exercise the Council's functions relating to town and country planning and development management in relation to all planning applications that are not dealt with by officers using delegated powers.

6. Meetings of Committee

- 6.1. The committee will be scheduled to meet on a monthly basis, with dates included within the Municipal Timetable approved by Full Council.
- 6.2. Extraordinary (Special) meetings of the committee may be called by the Proper Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the committee (or in their absence the Vice Chair), subject to the normal provisions under the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and the Council's Constitution.
- 6.3. The Council's agreed Planning Public Participation Policy will apply to the committee.

End of Planning Committee

Drafted April 2024

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Appendix B - In Year Updates to the Constitution To Be Effected

Section of the Constitution	Background	Proposed Amendment/s	Use of Power (MO Delegated or full Council)						
Part 8.6 Members Allowances Scheme	Backdated annual pay rise made in December 2023 needs to be applied.	Consequential amendments as per excel spreadsheet	MO delegated powers						
Part 9.1 Management Structure	To make consequential amendments following reorganisation of Corporate Leadership Team, end of January 2024	Management Structure diagram to be amended as follows:- 1) Executive Director of Customer and Governance (MO) to be replaced with	MO delegated powers						
Part 9.2 Officer Scheme of Delegation	To make consequential amendments following reorganisation of Corporate Leadership Team, end of January 2024	Executive Director of Customer and Governance delegated officer responsibilities to be re-allocated to Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Law and Governance respectively, in accordance with temporary CLT structure following appointment of new Chief Executive.	MO delegated powers						
Part 9.2 Officer Scheme of Delegation	To propose varying the current delegation to MO to make consequential and minor amendments to the Constitution, in order to provide for greater efficacy and compliance with the law.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Nature of Decision</th> <th>Officers</th> <th>Conditions</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>To make minor administrative changes to the constitution to reflect, for example, changes in or compliance with the law, changes to the Council's management structure or other changes with no significant impact.</td> <td>Director of Customer Law and Governance</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Nature of Decision	Officers	Conditions	To make minor administrative changes to the constitution to reflect, for example, changes in or compliance with the law, changes to the Council's management structure or other changes with no significant impact.	Director of Customer Law and Governance		Full Council Approval Required
Nature of Decision	Officers	Conditions							
To make minor administrative changes to the constitution to reflect, for example, changes in or compliance with the law, changes to the Council's management structure or other changes with no significant impact.	Director of Customer Law and Governance								
Part 9.3 List of Proper Officers	To make consequential amendments following reorganisation of Corporate Leadership Team, end of January 2024	Executive Director of Customer and Governance delegated officer responsibilities to be re-allocated to Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Law and Governance respectively, in accordance with temporary CLT structure following appointment of new Chief Executive.	MO delegated powers						

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