

Democracy and Standards Committee

12th September 2022

Report Title	Start time of Full Council meetings
Report Author	Adele Wylie (Director of Governance/Human Resources & Monitoring Officer) <u>Adele.wylie@northnorthants.gov.uk</u>
Executive Member	N/A

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input 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 – TO FOLLOW results of the questionnaire to councillors and senior officers.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. For the Committee to consider formulating a recommendation to Full Council regarding the normal start time of full Council meetings.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Committee is requested to consider the appropriate start time for full Council meetings. The Committee's mandate does not extend to consideration of other formal or informal meetings of the Council. The choice of a 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.

- 2.2. The appendices attached to the report provide some data associated with attendance and participation at full Council meetings.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the Committee recommend to full Council that the normal start time of future meetings (with the exception of the Budget meeting and Special (Extraordinary) meetings be –

- (a) Morning start time e.g. 10:00 am; or
- (b) Afternoon start time e.g. 2:00 pm; or
- (c) Evening start time e.g. 7:00 pm; or
- (d) Another time.

- 3.2. *Reason for Recommendations – Full Council had requested that the Democracy and Standards Committee review the trial period and report back to full Council.*

Based upon previous discussions, the report provides a range of options for councillors to consider.

- 3.3. *Alternative Options Considered – As contained within the report.*

4. Report Background

- 4.1. Full Council agreed at its meeting on 29th September 2021 to trial an alternative start time for ordinary full Council meetings, moving from 7:00 pm to 2:00 pm start.
- 4.2. Full Council agreed to review this decision after a reasonable number of full Council meetings had been held at the trial start time of 2:00 pm.
- 4.3. Since that decision was agreed there have been seven meetings of the Full Council. Of these seven 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) 4 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 2:00 pm).
- 4.4. Whilst agreeing to trial the 2:00 pm start time for ordinary meetings, the full Council recognised the need to treat the Budget Full Council meeting as an exceptional case given the normal business to be discussed at that meeting, and a 10:00 am start time for that meeting was reaffirmed.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The decision as to what time meetings of the ordinary full Council meetings commence is a matter for councillors, Whilst traditionally at local borough and district council level full Council meetings commenced in the early evening, at county council level they were normally daytime meetings.
- 5.2. Whatever decision is made by full Council it is unlikely to meet approval from all 78 councillors, given the differing work and personal factors for each individual. In determining what may be considered the most favourable option, the Committee may wish to consider the following factors –
- Amount of business likely to be discussed at full Council meetings
 - Ability for effective and considered decision making
 - Level of councillor attendance
 - Ability for councillors to attend
 - Level of public participation and interaction
 - Ability for the public to attend i.e. access to public transport
 - Resource implications i.e. officer time
 - Availability of venue
 - Travel time to venue i.e. distance, health & safety issues.
- 5.3. Appendix A details the following –
- (i) Duration of the full Council meetings since May 2021;
 - (ii) The recorded number of apologies submitted for each meeting;
 - (iii) The number of direct public interactions inc. public giving statements, public asking questions and public presenting petitions.
- 5.4. Within Appendix A it will be noted that the Budget Council meeting was particularly lengthy given the business to be discussed. Full Council had previously agreed that for the Budget meeting a start time of 10:00 am would be approved. This would also allow for a clearly defined lunch break.
- 5.5. Within Appendix A it will be noted that 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. Five of the full Council meetings have been live streamed onto YouTube using an in-house solution developed by NNC IT. They have been streamed onto the main NNC YouTube account. Councillors will note that the installation of the new AV equipment in the Council Chamber is soon to be completed, which will provide a more robust solution in the longer term not just for meetings of the full Council but other meetings.

- 5.7. It is for NNC councillors to decide what start time is preferable. Appendix C provides some comparators based on similar (in terms of population size) unitary authorities. Councillors will note there are a range of start times which reflects the need for local circumstances to be taken into account. There is no predetermined start time.

It should be noted that based on the benchmarking group only –

- (a) The mode start time is 6:30 pm;
- (b) The mean start time is 4:23 pm; and
- (c) The median start time is 5:00 pm.

- 5.8. The Constitutional Working Group (CWG) when considering this matter requested that officers prepare an e-questionnaire to be sent to all councillors and appropriate senior officers seeking their views. The results from the e-questionnaire would be collated and reported to the Democracy and Standards Committee at its meeting. Responses would be anonymised.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. The Committee are requested to consider the options available and determine a recommendation to go forward to the full Council meeting on 29th September 2022.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1. Currently all full Council meetings are scheduled in the Municipal Timetable for a 2:00 pm start however if the final decision is to move to morning or evening meetings this can currently be accommodated with regard to staffing and venue. If there are to be evening starts, there will be a need to liaise with Facilities Management on the change in arrangements.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. There is no start time detailed in statute, therefore it is a matter for local choice.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1. When agreed the Council's Constitution would be updated including on the website. Whilst diary appointments have been issued for 2022/23 for a 2:00 pm start time these can be amended if required.

7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1. From a corporate 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.

- 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.

7.5. Consultation

- 7.5.1. The Constitutional Working Group (CWG) considered this matter at its meeting on 22nd August 2022. The Group suggested a survey was distributed to all 78 councillors and key officers (CLT and Democratic Services staff) seeking preferred options. The outcome of this survey will be presented to the Committee at its meeting.

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

- 7.9.1. Not applicable to this report.

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.
- 8.2. Constitutional Working Group Discussion Paper 22/08/22.