

Democracy and Standards Committee

February 2024

Report Title	Start time of Full Council meetings
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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

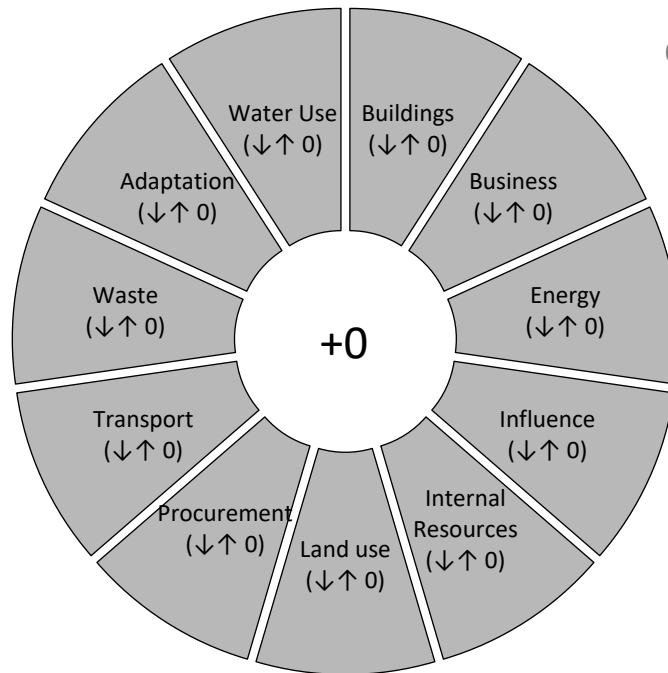
7.7.1. Not applicable to this report.

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](#)