

## Council

25 April 2024

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

### 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

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- 1.1. To consider and determine the start time of full Council meetings following discussion and recommendation by Democracy and Standards Committee on 15 April 2024.

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 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.
- 2.4. The Democracy and Standards Committee recommended a minor change to full council meeting times (other than the Budget meeting) with meetings proposed to commence at 6.00pm between 1 April and 31 October and 5.00pm between 1 November and 31 March each year.
- 2.5. Full Council could decide to approve the recommendation from Democracy and Standards, or choose one of the surveyed times of 10.00am, 2.00pm, or 6.00pm, or another alternative.

### **3. Recommendations**

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3.1. That council:-

- a) Reviews the start time of full Council meetings (with the exception of the Budget meeting); and
- b) The pattern of full council meeting times (other than for the Budget Council meeting) be incorporated into the municipal calendar, from the Annual Council meeting of 23 May 2024.

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 so that a start time can be settled on.*

3.3. *Since the revision of the start time to 6pm the business at 71% of meetings was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine.*

3.4. *Alternative Options Considered – the start time of full Council meetings is a matter of local choice for Council.*

### **4. Report Background**

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4.1. From 1 April 2021 full Council meetings were held at 7pm. Full Council agreed at its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> 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);

- (iii) 7 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 6:00 pm); and
- (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**

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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 predominately 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.
- The ability and impact of extension of the guillotine beyond the present 3 hours (limited for evening meetings).
- Health and safety. Tiredness can negatively impact Councillors in making decisions at meetings particularly where the agenda consists of several complex reports.
- Ability for effective and considered decision making.
- 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 to venue i.e. distance, timings at various points of the day, availability of public transport, 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:-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The Democracy and Standards Committee requested officers take steps to implement full usage of the AV equipment to facilitate attendance for public participation remotely at meetings for non-decision makers.

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

<b>Ordinary 2.00pm meetings</b>	<b>Ordinary 6.00pm meetings</b>	<b>Ordinary 7.00pm meetings</b>
0	2	0

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

<b>Ordinary 2.00pm meetings</b>	<b>Ordinary 6.00pm meetings</b>	<b>Ordinary 7.00pm meetings</b>
2	2	1

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

<b>Ordinary 2.00pm meetings</b>	<b>Ordinary 6.00pm meetings</b>	<b>Ordinary 7.00pm meetings</b>
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 (incl. 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.

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

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

\* The aforementioned figures are not taken as live viewing figures and are taken as a snapshot at a point following the meeting.

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 of which were collated and reported to the Democracy and Standards Committee. The outcome of this survey and anonymised responses are attached as Appendix D and are summarised below, 60 councillors having responded (78%) of the 77 councillors sitting on the Council at that point in time.

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

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

## 6. Next Steps

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6.1. Council is requested to consider the options available and determine the recommendation from Democracy and Standards that full council meetings between 1 April and 31 October commence at 6.00pm and between 1 November and 31 March commence at 5.00pm, or determine an alternative start time.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **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 night-time.



## **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.
- 7.5.2. Democracy and Standards Committee considered this matter at its meeting held on 15 April 2024. A variety of views were discussed with proposals for start times at each of 10.00am, 2.00pm and 6.00pm.
- 7.5.3. Those members in favour of a day start time raised issues including that of difficulty of travelling during rush hour to the meeting, travelling home during the dark - especially during winter, reduced evening public transport provision, and quality of decision making in evenings following a full day at work for some councillors.
- 7.5.4. Those members in favour of an evening start time raised issues including the benefit of greater accessibility for those in employment, those with childcare commitments and for the public being able to attend meetings after work.
- 7.5.5. Members also discussed the possibility of increasing public accessibility to council meetings by allowing them to participate remotely using the audio-visual equipment. The Monitoring Officer undertook to explore this with Democratic Services.
- 7.5.6. Democracy and Standards Committee resolved to recommend to full council a compromise change to the start time for full council meetings, proposing that in future meetings held between 1 April and 31 October commence at 6.00pm and those held between 1 November and 31 March commence at 5.00pm.

## **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.

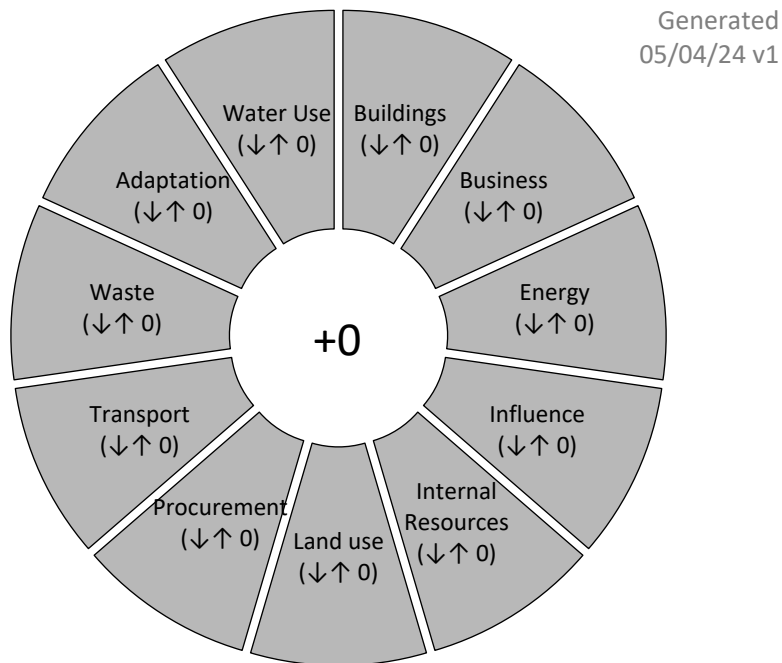
## **7.8. Equality Implications**

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

## **7.9. Climate Impact**

- 7.9.1. As the recommendation in this report is only proposing a very minor change to full council start times 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.



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

## 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

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8.1. [NNC Council Constitution](#)