



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Governance and Audit Committee


26 September 2023

Report of Councillor Philip Knowles,
Cabinet Member for Corporate
Governance and Licensing

Start times of Council meetings

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

The Governance and Audit Committee is requested to consider the results of a survey to all Members of the Council in respect of start times of the Council's public meetings.

Recommendations

That the Governance and Audit Committee:

- 1. Gives due consideration to the results of the survey to all Members of the Council on the start time of the Council's public meetings.**
- 2. Considers whether or not to make a formal recommendation to the Council's Head of Paid Service regarding any proposed changes to start times of meetings.**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	High performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 There may be financial implications arising from changes to the timing of meetings this report. However it is not considered that these would be of a material nature.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 Paragraph 6.1 of the Council's Constitution states that the time and place of meetings will be determined by the Chief Executive and notified in the summons. The Chief Executive is the Council's Head of Paid Service and has responsibility for the authority's management structure and deployment of Officers.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

Human Resources

- 1.3 Any proposal to hold meetings outside of the Council's normal office opening hours would require the Head of Paid Service to give due consideration to a number of potential impacts. These would include potential changes to the contractual terms of employment requiring Union consultation. Agreement would need to be reached on work patterns, statutory rest periods and individual circumstances such as flexible working arrangements or part time contracts. This would also involve an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure any potential changes are fair and do not present barriers or disadvantage protected groups.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt, Head of HR

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 At the Annual Meeting of the Council held on 18 May 2023 consideration was given to the authority's committee structure. During this item, discussion ensued on the subject of the start time of meetings of Full Council and it was agreed that this matter be referred to the Governance and Audit Committee for further consideration.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 14 June 2023 the Governance and Audit Committee agreed to conduct a survey to all Members of the Council regarding their preferred start times for all meetings of the Council.
- 2.3 This report sets out the results of the survey.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The Council's Constitution states that the time and place of meetings will be determined by the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive is the Council's Head of Paid Service and has responsibility for the authority's management structure which includes the deployment of Officers.
- 3.2 Meetings of Full Council have commenced at 1pm at South Kesteven District Council over the last two or three years and had previously commenced at 2pm.
- 3.3 Start times of meetings for Cabinet and other committees of the Council currently vary from 10am to 2pm.
- 3.4 A survey was sent to all Members of the Council and was open for two weeks to seek their views on preferred start times for meetings. 35 Members out of the Council's 56 completed the survey, equating to a 62.5% response rate.
- 3.5 The survey specifically asked Members their opinion regarding the start time of meetings of Full Council, Cabinet and other committees, seeking to establish whether the current timings should be changed, their preference for an alternative time and the reason for proposing a change, if necessary.
- 3.6 A full overview of the results to each question contained in the survey is attached at **Appendix A** to this report.

Full Council

- 3.7 Of those who took part in the survey, 52.94% of respondents suggested a change in the start time of meetings of Full Council. 41.18% thought that the existing start time should not change, whereas 5.88% were not sure or did not know.
- 3.8 From the 19 Councillors who answered the next question, 31.58% suggested a new start time of 2pm for meetings of Full Council. 26.32% jointly suggested start times of 10am and 4pm with 5.25% of respondents each suggesting 5pm, 6pm and 7pm respectively.

Cabinet

- 3.9 With regard to the start time for Cabinet, 54% of respondents thought that the current start time should remain the same, with 11.43% indicating that it should be changed and 34.29% stating they did not know or were not sure.
- 3.10 25% of respondents to the next question each suggested alternative start times of 11am, 4pm and 6pm as well as retaining the existing time of 2pm.

Other Committees

- 3.11 In terms of the start times for other committees, 57.58% of respondents did not wish for any changes to be made, with 27.27% indicating that they should be changed and 15.15% of respondents stating they did not know or were not sure.
- 3.12 30% of those who answered the next question each suggested alternative start times of 10am and 2pm, with 10% of respondents each stating their preference as 4pm, 5pm, 6pm and 7pm respectively.
- 3.13 The Governance and Audit Committee is invited to review the results of the survey and consider whether it wishes to make any recommendations regarding the start times of Full Council, Cabinet or other committees to the Council's Head of Paid Service.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 To make a recommendation to the Head of Paid Service regarding a change in the start times of meetings of Full Council, Cabinet or other committees.
- 4.2 To maintain the existing arrangements.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 This report facilitates a referral from the meeting of Full Council held on 18 May 2023 to the Governance and Audit Committee regarding proposals for changing the start times of the Council's public meetings.