

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Report to Democratic Services Committee  
8 January 2024**

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Interim Head of Transformation and Democratic Services

**REPORT TITLE:** New Ways of Working and Council meetings – member survey 2023

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**REPORT FOR:** **Decision**

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**1. Purpose**

To consider the New Ways of Working report and the Council meetings member survey 2023.

**2. Background**

A report on the New Ways of Working was considered by Council on 18 May 2023 and after discussion it was resolved to refer the report back to the Democratic Services Committee for further consideration. Since then the following have been undertaken:

- a survey of members regarding the timing of meetings [excluding Cabinet] and format of meetings and
- a survey of Cabinet members regarding the timing of meetings and format of meetings and
- a log kept of the number of members attending online or in person when a hybrid meeting is held.

**3. Members' survey**

3.1 The Council, in accordance with Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, must review the timing of meetings at least once a term. In addition to asking a question about the timing of meetings, members were also asked their preference for the format of meetings i.e. Online only, in County Hall only or Hybrid meeting i.e. online and in County Hall.

**3.2 Council meetings [excluding Cabinet] – Appendix 1**

36 members [53%] and five co-opted members [100%] responded. The majority of members chose 10.00am as the most preferable start time for meetings. In respect of Full Council meetings, it should be noted that Group Leaders meet with the Chair of Council and officers prior to Group meetings. The meeting of Group Leaders with the Chair usually finish by 9.00am and so

Groups could meet between 9.00am and 10.00 am, allowing the Council meeting to start at 10.00a.m.

In respect of the format of meetings the majority chose hybrid meetings as the preferred choice for all meetings.

3.4 The comments from respondents should also be noted.

**3.5 Cabinet meetings – Appendix 2**

11 members [100%] responded. The majority of members opted for a preferred start time of 10am. In respect of the format of meetings all chose hybrid meetings for all meetings.

3.6 The comments from respondents should also be noted.

**4. Log of the number of members attending online or in person when a hybrid meeting is held.**

Between March and November 2023, 16 hybrid meetings have taken place [excluding Cabinet and Council meetings]. Information from the log shows the following:

- Majority of members attending online - 81% of meetings
- Members attending in person – 19% of meetings. These meetings were – a Planning, Taxi Licensing and Rights of Way Committee, a Leisure Review Joint Working Group and a Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

**5. Issues for discussion**

5.1 In respect of the timing of meetings it seems clear that Members support the current timings of meetings. It should however be noted that Committee Chairs, in discussion with their Committees, can change the timing of meetings to suit the Committee membership and also in response to agenda items, such as when external participants are required at a particular meeting.

5.2 When considering the format of meetings, the majority of members chose hybrid meetings for all meetings (evidenced by the actual attendance at meetings between March and November 2023). However, the Chair is able to change the format of a meeting as required.

5.3 In addition to the above, the Committee may also wish to consider whether:

- The meetings of all Committees, during the first six months at the start of a new Council term should all be held in person in County Hall. This will enable newly elected members to develop links with each other, with returning members, develop the relationships within a committee and support the sharing of skills and knowledge.
- That the Chair of each committee considers holding at least one meeting a year, as a meeting in person.

- That the Democratic Services Committee reviews the timing and format of meetings again in mid-2025, so that any changes can be implemented from 2026 onwards.

## **6. Recommendation**

That the Committee considers the report and recommends to full Council that:

- the current working arrangements continue except that Full Council meetings commence at 10am
- Committee Chairs, in discussion with their Committees, can change the timing of meetings to suit the Committee membership and also in response to agenda items, such as when external participants are required at a particular meeting
- the Chair of each committee considers holding at least one meeting a year, as a meeting in person
- meetings of all Committees, during the first six months at the start of a new Council term should all be held in person in County Hall and
- the Democratic Services Committee reviews the timing and format of meetings again in mid-2025, so that any changes can be implemented from 2026 onwards.

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## Council meetings Member survey 2023

In accordance with the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Government under Section 6(1) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the council is required to survey members in respect of the times meetings are held at least once a term. The results will be reported to the Democratic Services Committee [DSC], when it will also consider the New Ways of Working report, which has been referred back to it by Council. DSC will then make a recommendation to Council, after which the Council's calendar for 2024 will be produced.

Q1. Name - 36 responses received.

Q2 & 3. Please consider the following and choose what time of day you would prefer the meeting to start.

Committee [nbr members]	9.30 am	10.00 am	10.30 am	11.00 am	11.30 am	2.00 pm	2.30 pm	3.00 pm	3.30 pm	4.00 pm	6.00 pm	6.30 pm	7.00 pm
Full Council [63]	2	21	10	1		1		6		1	4		
Planning, Taxi Licensing & Rights of Way [17]	1	12		1			1	2			1	1	
Scrutiny Committees [31]	2	15	1			3	1	7		1	2	1	1
Employment & Appeals [11]	2	7	1			1		4			1	1	
Democratic Services Committee [11]	1	10	2					2			1	1	
Governance & Audit [6]	1	9	1			1		4		1	2	1	
Finance Panel [9]	1	11				1		3		1	2	1	
Pensions & Investment [5]	2	9				1		4		1	2	1	

4. Meetings can now be held in a variety of ways. What format for meetings would you like.

	Online only	County Hall only	Hybrid meeting i.e. online and in County Hall	No preference
Full Council	2	11	22	
Planning, Taxi Licensing & Rights of Way	1	4	17	6
Scrutiny Committees	5	2	19	6
Employment & Appeals	5	5	9	8
Democratic Services Committee	4	1	13	7
Governance & Audit	5		11	7
Finance Panel	6		12	7
Pensions & Investment	5		12	7

5. Use the box below to add any comments:

Comment

- ❖ I think the having the first meeting of the term for any committee or working group in person has merits.
- ❖ I would welcome an increase in evening meetings, we have made a step forward in diversifying council this time and having some meetings in an evening as online only would increase the potential for younger working members of the county to seek election.
- ❖ I feel that the full council is the only opportunity that we have to meet all the other councillors together and i believe it is important that we do meet face to face and have the opportunity to get to know each other over a cup of coffee. In respect to the other committees that I would prefer to be face to face, these are the ones where members of the public (Planning etc) or individual officers (Employment) will be present to present their individual case / point of view in respect to the issue being discussed and I feel we, as councillors, have the duty to afford them the opportunity to present their case to us in person and in the same room.
- ❖ I personally struggle with mornings but realise they may suit others better.
- ❖ I believe the PTRW committee should have a hybrid option because of the varied contributors from different locations. However, there is learning, insight and understanding that can be better gleaned from a well attended County Hall meeting. The agenda, however, is an important consideration for attendance.. As a member who resides an hour and twenty minutes from County Hall I am fully committed to my role but I would occasionally reserve the right to work from home due to local commitments.. There is also a Housing Scrutiny committee which includes, and is led by, tenants and serviced by PCC officers. It meets generally in the morning.

- ❖ Choice of County Hall with hybrid option for those who cant meet face to face. But not on line only.
- ❖ I believe Finance Panel Meetings every third meeting should be face to face only. I do wish to have later or evening meetings.
- ❖ We must continue to reduce travel where we can, it save time and carbon and increases opportunities to attend.
- ❖ The hybrid meetings are much better for me for two reasons, firstly the distance of travel, secondly I find hearing loops outside of the chamber lacking.
- ❖ It is difficult to manage childcare, work and council. If we don't have a hybrid system I would struggle and then I would need to make a choice if I stayed or not. This would be reflected and could mean only the retired or wealthy could be councillors as they would have the time.
- ❖ Full Council needs to start at 10am. Most other committees (besides Planning) are normally a few hours so could start at 2pm. I believe full council should be in the chamber as much as possible.
- ❖ Not meeting face-to-face is having a detrimental effect on the mental health of councillors and officers. Chief Planning Officer's response to a damning Audit Report includes the disadvantages of staff not being in the office together. Attending meetings means that councillors can also have valuable conversations with officers.
- ❖ I think meetings should return to County Hall. I don't know hal the Council as I never see them.
- ❖ As a disbaled cllr with limited mobility, being able to wok on a hybrid system enables me to attend meetings that I wouldnt be able to attend otherwise. Without the introduction of this hybrid system, I would not be able to work nor would i have the capcity to continue with my role as a cllr. For me it is an accommodation that is required, rather than a preference.

## Council meetings - Cabinet Member survey 2023

In accordance with the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Government under Section 6(1) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the council is required to survey members in respect of the times meetings are held at least once a term. The results will be reported to the Democratic Services Committee [DSC], when it will also consider the New Ways of Working report, which has been referred back to it by Council. DSC will then make a recommendation to Council, after which the Council's full calendar for 2024 will be produced.

1. Name – 11 responses received.

2. Please consider the following and choose what time of day you would prefer the meeting to start.

	Responses
9.30am	1
10am	8
10.30am	1
11am	
11.30am	
2pm	
2.30pm	
3pm	
3.30pm	
4pm	1
6pm	
6.30pm	
7pm	
I have no preference	1

3. Meetings can now be held in a variety of ways. What format for meetings would you like.

	Responses
Online only	
In County Hall only	
Hybrid meeting i.e. online and in County Hall	11
No preference	

4. Use the box below to add any comments

- We need to be more strategic about those in attendance and free people up to do the delivery. Starting at 4pm would give time to do the day job and focus people to not drag meetings out.

- I work near full time and do have a flexible diary but struggle to commit time to being at cabinet meeting. The fact that they are set in advance and regular on a Tuesday is at least a help if I need to plan around some of them.
- Strongly prefer the hybrid model for the greater flexibility it offers.
- Due to distance of travel, hybrid provides the best option for me.