

## **EXTRACT OF STATUTORY GUIDANCE SHOWING CHANGES RELATING TO THE TIMING OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

1. This statutory Guidance was made under Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). By virtue of section 6 (2) of the Measure, local authorities must have regard to this guidance in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings of a local authority are held. The relevant meetings in the context of this guidance are meetings of the full council and any committee or sub-committee of the council.
2. The guidance is summarised below with the key changes identified in bold and include:

### Purpose

- **The times at which the meetings of a council take place is of considerable significance as it can affect the extent to which individuals may contemplate standing for election. It is also important to provide for flexibility to support the changing needs of councillors when they are elected so that diversity can be maintained. This is an area for concern as it may impact on the diversity of membership of the council and thus impact on the council's ability to make decisions which are informed by and reflect the diversity of people living in the council area. Decision making informed by insight from people of all ages and backgrounds is likely to be more balanced and have more focus on sustainable and long term solutions which balance the needs of different people in keeping with the principles set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.**

**For example, whilst the requirement to provide the facility for multi-location meetings for members who wish to join meetings remotely should overcome some concerns, many people will find attending, sometimes lengthy meetings, in the day is incompatible with their paid employment and certain times of day are challenging for people with caring responsibilities such as young children. Therefore, for the purposes of this guidance the timing of meetings also includes their frequency and length.**

### Reviewing existing arrangements

- It is neither practical nor desirable for the Welsh Government to prescribe the times, length and frequency of meetings of the full council, its committees and sub-committees as these are matters for each council to consider in individual circumstances. However, it is important that councils do not simply continue to hold their meetings at the same time, in the same way as they have always done, simply out of inertia. What may have been tradition or an arrangement which suited the previous cohort of councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the current one. **It is recommended that meetings should be held of a length and at times, intervals and locations which are convenient to its members, having regard to equality and diversity**

**issues. Also, regardless of whether meetings are fully on-line, multi-location or in person, agendas should provide for suitable breaks as this not only promotes a more effective meeting but is essential for members' and officers' health and well-being.**

Therefore, all local authorities should review the times, frequency and length of meetings at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new council is elected. **However, it would be prudent to consider an increase in this frequency to accommodate changes in circumstances that may accrue during that period.**

Councils should survey their members, at least once shortly after each election, to assess their preferences and should be committed to act on the conclusions. **The survey should be carried out at such time as it will be of most benefit to incoming members but no later than six months following ordinary elections.** It will then be for each authority to decide on the regularity of such surveys.

Issues to be taken into account in conducting a survey could include:

- Whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred;
- **Whether meetings are to be in person, fully online or multi-location;**
- **The preferred meeting length;**
- Whether particular times cause difficulties for councillors with particular characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, having caring responsibilities or being in employment.

**When considering the results of the survey, councils will need to balance a range of responses and while committed to flexibility it may not be possible to accommodate every individuals' circumstances at all meetings. In these circumstances councils should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of meeting all of their members needs all of the time. Any such arrangements will, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public.**