

**SUBJECT: START TIME AND DURATION OF MEETINGS**

**DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**

**REPORT AUTHOR: ANGELA ANDREWS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To consider amending the Terms of Reference of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to set an earlier start time for meetings and place a cap on the duration of meetings.

## **2. Main Report**

- 2.1 There have been a number of instances over the last municipal year in particular whereby meetings of Scrutiny Committees have exceeded three hours in duration. With the start time for these meetings being 6pm, this meant that some meetings did not close until beyond 9pm.
- 2.2 It is considered that to have meetings which extend so long into the evening is not conducive for members and officers to having fair and informed discussions. In addition, from an engagement perspective, it is questionable whether such late meetings could discourage people from certain demographics from standing for election as well as potentially put members of the public off attending and observing proceedings.
- 2.3 Scrutiny Committee meetings normally rely upon internal or external contributors to provide presentations, present reports or provide information to assist with the Committees' deliberations. Questions have been raised as to the effectiveness of meetings that are held for so long, together with the expectation that internal or external contributors are required to be present for that duration in the evening on top of a normal working day.
- 2.4 It would be more difficult to place a cap on the duration of meetings for the Council's regulatory committees, such as the Executive or the Planning Committee for example, due to the timescales associated with their decision-making and the ramifications of delaying any decisions. The Ethics and Engagement Committee may still wish to consider, however, the start times associated with all of the Council's evening meetings.
- 2.5 In view of this, the Ethics and Engagement Committee is invited to consider the following options:
- (i) setting a revised start time of 5.30pm for Scrutiny Committee meetings as opposed to 6pm;
  - (ii) agreeing that no Scrutiny Committee meeting should exceed a set duration, such as two hours for example;

- (iii) agreeing that no Scrutiny Committee meeting should exceed a set duration, such as two hours for example, without agreement of at least the majority of voting members present;
- (iv) an amalgamation of (i), (ii) and (iii) above in respect of Scrutiny Committee meetings;
- (v) setting a consistent start time for all of the Council's evening meetings;
- (vi) making no changes to the existing arrangements.

#### **4. Organisational Impacts**

##### **4.1 Finance (including whole life costs where applicable)**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

##### **4.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

#### **5. Recommendation**

- 5.1 That the Ethics and Engagement Committee considers the options set out in paragraph 2.5 and, if necessary, makes a recommendation to Council.

<b>Is this a key decision?</b>	No
<b>Do the exempt information categories apply?</b>	No
<b>Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?</b>	No
<b>How many appendices does the report contain?</b>	None
<b>List of Background Papers:</b>	None

**Lead Officer:**

Graham Watts, Democratic Team Leader and  
Elections Manager  
Telephone (01522) 873439