

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>CHANGING THE TIMING OF MEETINGS</b>
<b>DIRECTORATE:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The Committee received a report regarding achieving gender equality in local government at its meeting of 1 September 2014 and requested further information regarding the potential impact of changing the timing of evening meetings.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 On 1 September 2014 members considered a summary of a number of independent reports regarding the significant under-representation of women in public roles, including acting as councillors.
- 2.2 A recurring recommendation in these reports was that local authorities holding evening committee meetings could improve their accessibility to female councillors by making the start times for their meetings earlier.
- 2.3 Having considered this recommendation, the Committee resolved to request further details regarding the operating arrangements of other local and comparator (i.e. those areas of a similar nature to Lincoln) councils and the impact, if any, this had upon the relative balance of men and women within the Council.

## **3. Information on other local authorities**

- 3.1 It should be noted at the outset that data gathered as part of this report cannot offer a definitive guide as to the extent to which a council moving its meetings from the evening to the daytime will affect the ratio of male to female councillors. While members may be able to discern some patterns, there are a wide variety of other factors that influence the gender balance of local authorities, not least the choices made by electors and political parties. It is to be stressed that any correlation between meeting times and gender ratios does not necessarily indicate the causation of any one factor by another.
- 3.2 All information has been drawn from publicly available sources without directly consulting the relevant councils. As such, this information does not reflect the timings of any non-public meetings which councillors attend. Equally, while an attempt has been made to indicate the most frequent times for meetings below, there can be a considerable variety of meeting times within individual councils.

### 3.3 **Lincolnshire District Councils**

Boston Borough Council (mixture of morning, afternoon, and evening meetings)

Male: 23 (72%)

Female: 9 (28%)

Total: 32

East Lindsey District Council (morning and afternoon, bar evening Council and area committee meetings)

Male: 42 (70%)

Female: 18 (30%)

Total: 60

Lincoln

Male: 21 (64%)

Female: 12 (36%)

Total: 33

North Kesteven District Council (principally afternoon meetings)

Male: 26 (60%)

Female: 17 (40%)

Total: 43

South Kesteven District Council (morning and afternoon meetings)

Male: 43 (74%)

Female: 15 (26%)

Total: 58

West Lindsey District Council (evening meetings)

Male: 26 (70%)

Female: 11 (30%)

Total: 37

### 3.4 **Lincolnshire Upper-Tier/Unitary Council**

Lincolnshire County Council (morning and afternoon)

Male: 52 (68%)

Female: 25 (32%)

Total: 77

North Lincolnshire Council (mixture of morning, afternoon, and evening meetings)

Male: 33 (77%)

Female: 10 (23%)

Total: 43

North East Lincolnshire Council (mixture of morning, afternoon, and evening meetings)

Male: 32 (76%)

Female: 10 (24%)

Total: 42

### 3.5 **Comparator councils with daytime meetings**

Barrow Borough Council (mostly afternoon meetings bar Council at 17:30)

Male: 22 (61%)

Female: 14 (39%)

Total: 36

Chesterfield Borough Council (afternoon meetings)

Male: 34 (71%)

Female: 14 (29%)

Total: 48

Norwich City Council (all meetings bar Council start before 17:00)

Male: 20 (51%)

Female: 19 (49%)

Total: 39

## 4. **Options for Action**

- 4.1 Having evaluated the information provided above, members are recommended to consider whether the current arrangements for the start times of meetings are appropriate, having particular regard to the needs of councillors and the public. A list of typical meeting times is produced below for information.

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Time</b>
Annual Meeting	11:00am
Asset Management Group	4.30pm
Audit	6:00pm
Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee	10.00am
Chamber of Commerce	4:30pm
Commons Advisory Panel	6:30pm
Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee	6:00pm
Council	6:30pm
Equality and Diversity Group	5:00pm
Employee JCC	2:00pm
Employee JCC (Health, Safety and Welfare)	1:30pm
Ethics & Engagement	6:00pm
Executive	6:00pm
Hackney Carriage and Private Hire	5:30pm
HEAP	6:00pm
Housing Scrutiny	6:00pm
Licensing	5:30pm
Licensing Sub	10:00am
Member Workshops	5:30pm
Performance Scrutiny	6:00pm
Planning	5:30pm
Policy Scrutiny	6:00pm
Select Scrutiny	6:00pm
Shared Revenues and Benefits Joint Committee	10:00am or 2:00pm
SRG	5:30pm

- 4.2 Members will note that there is considerable variety in the start time of meetings, including those which take place in the evening. The majority of this variation in start times appears to be principally a matter of tradition.
- 4.3 As members will be aware, during the pre-election period the majority of meetings take place at 17:00, while the Licensing and Planning Committees start at 17:30 throughout the year. Attendance rates for these meetings suggest that the earlier start time does not cause any decrease in attendance compared to meetings beginning at later times.
- 4.4 As noted by members at the previous meeting, every possible start time for meetings is likely to be convenient for some and inconvenient for others. Significant factors affecting this include potential carer responsibilities and whether councillors are retired, working standard office hours, or working shifts. While councillors do have the legal right to receive 'reasonable' time off from their employer to attend committee meetings, it is understandable that members will want to inconvenience an employer as little as possible by attending meetings outside their normal working hours.
- 4.5 One of the advantages associated with earlier meeting times would include marginally increased access to public transport for attendees in advance of the close of any evening services. There would also be a reduction in lost time for officers waiting for meetings to begin and a potential improvement in work-life balance. Further options in this regard include the chairs of meetings encouraging officers to attend committee solely for items they are presenting, rather than remaining present throughout a meeting.
- 4.6 While a move to exclusively daytime meetings would be a very significant change and cause a clash in meeting times with Lincolnshire County Council, a harmonisation of evening meeting times at either 17:00 or 17:30 would appear to be feasible and potentially advantageous. If members are minded to recommend a change to the default start time of committees and Councils, this could be agreed as part of Council's annual approval of the timetable of meetings in February 2015.

## **5. Organisational Impacts**

### **5.1 Finance**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 That members consider recommending to Council that the 2015/16 Timetable of Meetings incorporates earlier start times of either 17:00 or 17:30 for meetings wherever possible and appropriate.