

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Standards Committee 10 March 2010  
**AUTHOR/S:** Chief Executive / Executive Director (Corporate Services)

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### STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2010/11 MEETING SCHEDULE

#### Purpose

1. To agree the dates and times of Standards Committee meetings in the 2010/11 municipal year. This is not a key decision.

#### Background

2. A number of Council bodies have reviewed the timing of their meetings for the coming year, with the majority agreeing on daytime meetings; however, it is worth considering whether evening meetings increase public interest, and provide opportunities for people in full-time employment to apply to be co-opted as parish or independent members.
3. Evening committee and Council meetings have been tried at various times throughout the Council's history, never with any consequent increase in public attendance or any change in the demographic make-up of the authority. Whenever evening meetings have been considered, the majority of district councillors highlight the number of local commitments in their villages, such as meetings of parish councils, which are almost always scheduled in the evenings, and the fact that their primary responsibility is to their electorate.
4. The Standards Committee is unlike other Council bodies in that it has co-opted parish council and independent members. The application packs for both categories of member state specifically that meetings are held in Cambourne during the daytime, so applicants are aware from the start the commitment required. A move to evening meetings could encourage a wider range of applicants for the three forthcoming parish council and independent vacancies, but might also increase the difficulty in finding meeting dates suitable for the majority. Evening meetings might equally discourage applicants who already have evening family or caring responsibilities, but who would be available during the daytime while dependants are in school.
5. Although it does not specifically address the subject of evening meetings, Standards for England's own guidance states, "When scheduling hearings, standards committees should bear in mind that late night and very lengthy hearings are not ideal for effective decision-making".

#### Considerations

6. Since 2009/10 the Standards Committee has been making use of breakfast or lunchtime sessions for training or workshops with members of other committees with links to standards. The District Council's catering staff finish work at 3.30 pm, so training sessions or workshops over the evening meal period would require external catering or attendees to 'bring their own'. Arranging additional training dates other than on meeting days would increase the number of road journeys to and from the Council offices and travel expenses claimed. Evening meetings limit the availability

of non-Committee attendees, particularly officers not normally expected to attend the meeting, but who might be required to provide clarification of an issue.

7. The Council's Senior Management Team has confirmed that staff working arrangements will not contravene the EU Working Time Directive, which guarantees employees at least eleven hours between working days. The Council's two caretakers cannot be scheduled to work the morning following an evening meeting, which creates scheduling difficulties, as it is not known until the offices have closed for the evening when the caretakers will be able to return to work the following morning, and temporary staff have to be hired to cover any shortfall. Evening meetings also place additional pressure the following morning on other members of the Legal and Democratic Services team, which has been reduced by two posts recently, or will delay matters which can be addressed only by the officers who were at a meeting the previous evening.

### Implications

8. Financial	Staff attending evening meetings may be able to claim overtime and subsistence. Temporary staff might be needed, particularly for the Caretaking team, to cover duties the morning after an evening meeting. If the Standards Committee has to schedule training sessions on non-meeting days, there will be additional travel expense claims made.
Legal	None.
Staffing	As above, the EU Working Time Directive limits the ability of staff to return to work early in the morning following an evening meeting, and could require additional temporary staff.
Risk Management	None.
Equal Opportunities	None.

### Consultations

9. Other Cambridgeshire authorities. The majority have daytime meetings and note that this is preferred by their members as it minimises the possibility of conflicts with other evening duties. It is worth noting that two of the three authorities which have evening meetings, Cambridge City Council and Peterborough City Council (East Cambridgeshire being the third), attendees do not have as far to travel to and from the meeting venue as those in the rural districts and the county as a whole. Peterborough notes that its meetings are planned so they do not run for more than two hours. No other authorities schedule training or workshops on Standards Committee meeting dates.
10. All Cambridgeshire authorities were unanimous in their agreement that the time of a meeting had no effect on public attendance; rather, public attendance was dependent upon the agenda, and was highest at Hearings Panels, all of which had been held in the daytime.
11. Other Standards Committees were consulted via the Standards for England Forum. The one response received was from a parish council member of the Torrington District Council (Devon) Standards Committee stating that the full committee and sub-committee meetings were scheduled for Friday mornings because available evening dates coinciding for the Committee's fifteen members were too rare.

## Effect on Strategic Aims

12.	<b>Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.</b>
	None specific.
	<b>Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.</b>
	None specific.
	<b>Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.</b>
	None specific.
	<b>Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.</b>
	None specific.
	<b>Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.</b>
	Elected members' primary responsibility is to the people they represent, and attendance at parish council meetings is essential for bringing reports from the District Council, and to receiving updates from the parish council and hearing issues of local concern to report back to the District Council. There are 39 parish councils directly represented on the Standards Committee by the four Parish Members and eight District Council members (two of whom are also County Council members). Evening meetings would also limit the availability of Committee members to attend parish council meetings when invited.

## Recommendations

13. To agree the following dates and times for 2010-11, in keeping with the Standards Committee's usual practice of quarterly meetings on the second or third Wednesday of the month, where these meetings do not conflict with other Council meetings:
- Wednesday 16 June 2010 at 10 am (first available date after Annual General Meeting of Council)
  - Wednesday 15 September 2010 at 10 am
  - Wednesday 8 December 2010 at 10 am
  - Wednesday 9 March 2011 at 10 am
14. To note that extraordinary meetings may be scheduled if required.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Direct.gov Employment Advice ([www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk))

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