West Surrey Shadow Authority		
Report title: Schedule of Meetings for West Surrey Council 2027/28.		
Report to: Standards Committee		
Date: 2 November 2026		
Executive Portfolio Holder / Lead Councillor responsible: Cllr Victoria Kiehl, Executive Member for Governance, Democracy and Corporate Services		
Report of: Susan Sale, Interim Monitoring Officer		
Report author(s): Rachel Whillis, Democratic Services Sub Workstream Lead.		
Wards affected: All **Ward councillors informed:** No		
Exempt from publication: No		
Key Decision: No	**If a Key Decision, date registered on Forward Plan:** n/a	
Report cleared for publication by:		
People Workstream	N/A	N/A
Equalities Impact Assessment complete	N/A	N/A
Implementation Team Leader (or their delegate)	N/A	N/A
S151 Officer	Vicky Radford	20 October 2026
Monitoring Officer	Susan Sale	21 October 2026
Executive Portfolio Holder consultation	Cllr Victoria Kiehl	21 October 2026
Committee Chair consultation	Cllr Richard Wilson	21 October 2026
Head of Paid Service	Susan Sale on behalf of Andy Brown	21 October 2026

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report proposes the adoption of a set of principles for meeting scheduling for the new authority, including agreeing the day, time and scheduling pattern for each decision making body. The proposed principles take into account responses to the member availability survey, best practice principles, and equality considerations. The principles will be used to set the Schedule of Meetings 2027/28 once the final committee structure has been agreed.

1.2 The principles for scheduling meetings have been designed to allocate timings that best suit the nature of the meeting, for example, meetings that involve partner organisations will be scheduled during the day, whilst meetings that are expected to have higher levels of public engagement will be scheduled in the evening.

2 Recommendations:

2.1 That the Standards Committee resolves to:

2.1.1 **Note the results of the member survey on meeting times and availability;**

2.1.2 **Approve the principles attached in Appendix 2 to this report, that will be used to create the final timetable once the committee structure has been approved as part of the Constitution;**

2.1.3 **Note the expectation that, with the exception of any area-based committees, the meetings of the Council, Executive and Standing Committees of the Council will be conducted at the Civic Headquarters at Millmead House in Guildford; and**

2.1.4 **Recommend to the Shadow Authority that authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Legal & Governance, in consultation with the Group Leaders, to approve the Schedule of Meetings 2027/28, once the committee structure has been approved.**

3 Reason(s) for recommendation:

3.1 Recommendation 2.1.1 – To ensure that members understand the range of views and needs expressed by respondents to the survey when they consider options for the scheduling of all meetings.

3.2 Recommendation 2.1.2 – To agree a set of principles that can inform proposals for the Schedule of Meetings once the committee structure has been agreed and provide a clear and transparent approach to this work.

3.3 Recommendation 2.1.3 – To provide a clear and consistent approach in relation to the location of meetings from 1 April 2027 onwards.

3.4 Recommendation 2.1.4 – To enable an efficient and timely decision, based upon the principles adopted, one the final committee structure is known. Early notification will help advise members of their suitability to nominate themselves to a committee.

4 Next steps

4.1 A report will be presented for consideration at the West Surrey Shadow Authority meeting on 19 November 2026, confirming the decision of the Standards Committee regarding the adopted principles, and seeking the appropriate delegation to agree the schedule.

4.2 Further work will be carried out following these meetings to draft a timetable that incorporates all of the Standing Committees of the Council, once the committee structure has been agreed, as part of the work on the Constitution for West Surrey Council.

4.3 It is proposed that the Executive Director for Legal & Governance will be authorised to agree the final Schedule of Meetings after consultation with the Group Leaders.

4.4 It is anticipated that a schedule of meetings for West Surrey Council for 27/28 will be confirmed by early February 2027.

5 Exemption from publication

5.1 None of this report is exempt from publication.

6 Background and Proposal

6.1 The Standards Committee is asked to consider proposals for the meeting schedule for 1 April 2027 onwards.

6.2 The Shadow Authority has previously considered the subject of meeting scheduling during the shadow period, at which time it was proposed that a comprehensive exercise be undertaken in September 2026 to develop a schedule of meetings for West Surrey Council that will run from 1 April 2027. This work was proposed to involve seeking the views of councillors, revisiting best practice principles, and take into account the increased number of committees that the authority will need to have in place once it has assumed full responsibility for council functions from the predecessor councils.

6.3 A survey with councillors was undertaken in September 2026 on their availability and further detail is included in section 7 of this report and Appendix 1.

6.4 It is anticipated that it will be necessary to schedule meetings at a range of times as it will not be possible to accommodate all meetings the authority will require at one time of a day. Furthermore, it is considered to be good practice to schedule meetings at a variety of times. This will enable groups to allocate members to meetings that best meets their other circumstances.

6.5 The work on the Constitution is ongoing, and a definitive list of committees has not yet been agreed by the Shadow Authority. It is not therefore possible to propose a final schedule of meetings. As a result, detailed information that is proposed to be used when drafting the Schedule of Meetings is set out in Appendix 2. The main principles are as follows:

6.5.1 Council meetings will be held on Wednesday evenings, in line with the schedule detailed in the Appendix. The Appendix also includes proposed dates for these meetings in 2027/28.

6.5.2 Executive meetings will be scheduled in the mornings of the second Tuesday of each month.

6.5.3 If the Access to Information Rules require public meetings for any Portfolio Holder decision making, these meetings will be aligned with meetings of the Executive.

6.5.4 Overview & Scrutiny meetings will be scheduled to align with the lead in times for Executive meetings (second or third week of a month where a meeting is scheduled).

6.5.5 Planning Committee meetings will be scheduled on Thursday evenings of the first week of the month. It is suggested that, if there is more than one Planning Committee agreed as part of the committee structure, committees are also held on the third Thursday of the month. Furthermore, if a strategic planning committee is established this will be scheduled during the daytime on a Thursday.

6.5.6 All other meetings are proposed to be scheduled on a periodic basis, in line with the proposals in Appendix 2.

6.5.7 The timetable has also been prepared with a view to accommodating training, political groups meetings, and associated meetings, within the timetable.

6.6 Members are reminded that the timetable can be reviewed prior to the schedule being set for 2028/29.

6.7 Research into practice has been undertaken and information arising from this work is set out in Appendix 3. The findings set out in the appendix have influenced the proposals set out throughout this report and the scheduling principles in Appendix 2.

Locations for Meetings

6.8 At its meeting on 12 October 2026, the Shadow Executive agreed to designate Millmead House, Guildford as the preferred Day 1 Civic Headquarters for West Surrey Council. The report proposing this decision stated that the chosen Civic Headquarters would need to accommodate Full Council meetings but did not specify whether meetings of the Executive and other committees would also be expected to meet at the Civic HQ.

6.9 It is now suggested that, with the exception of the committees that have an area-specific focus, from 1 April 2027 all meetings of the Full Council, Executive and the Standing Committees of the Council will be scheduled to meet at the designated Civic Headquarters in Guildford. This will provide a number of efficiencies and assist the options for ICT associated with democratic processes and the streaming of meetings, whilst also providing clarity for members, officers and residents on where decision making will take place. It is also expected to help reduce some challenges that have been presented during the shadow period by the use of different locations.

7 Consultation

7.1 All members of the Shadow Authority were invited to complete a survey seeking feedback on their availability for meetings and provide information on their preferences and any of the factors they felt should be considered when proposing the timetable of meetings. A total of 68 responses were received to the survey from West Surrey councillors, representing a 75.5% response rate.

7.2 The survey asked councillors to indicate whether they were available at 10am, 2pm, 5pm, and 7pm, Monday to Thursday, and 10am and 2pm on Fridays. These time slots were chosen with consideration of travel time across the authority area and how that could impact members working full or half days, school collection times, and ensuring there would be sufficient time to conduct a meeting's business.

7.3 The consultation responses have indicated a range of availability and preferences for meeting scheduling, as well as a variety of factors members have asked to be taken into consideration. The survey did not highlight a clear preferred day or time for meetings.

7.4 There were some recurring themes in responses, including references to work commitments and caring responsibilities influencing availability. Comments also referenced the vast geography of the area, consideration of meetings time, the length of meetings, and ensuring the timetable supports good decision making.

7.5 More detailed information on the survey responses is set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

8 Key Risks

8.1 There is a risk that the timing and location of meetings may limit the ability of some members to attend, resulting in reduced participation or, in some cases, meetings not being quorate. Meeting arrangements may also affect attendance by residents, partners and other stakeholders. This risk will be mitigated by taking account of the member survey, accessibility, travel times, public participation and the requirements of different meeting types when preparing the final Schedule of Meetings.

8.2 The committee structure has not yet been finalised and may differ from the assumptions used to develop the proposed scheduling principles. This could result in insufficient capacity within the timetable, conflicting meetings or changes being required after publication. This risk will be mitigated by approving the principles rather than a final timetable at this stage and completing the Schedule of Meetings once the committee structure has been agreed.

8.3 The overall number and distribution of meetings may place pressure on the members, specialist officers, venues and technical resources required to support them. This could affect meeting resilience and the timely progression of business between committees, the Executive and Council. This risk will be mitigated through reasonable notice, coordination between meeting cycles, a balanced distribution of meetings and sufficient flexibility to arrange additional or revised meetings where necessary.

9 Options

9.1 Option 1 (recommended option): endorse the proposed principles that will be used for scheduling meetings and recommend that the Shadow Authority delegates authority to the Executive Director for Legal & Governance in consultation with the Group Leaders to finalise the Schedule of Meetings 2027/28.

9.2 Option 2: endorse the proposed principles that will be used for scheduling meetings, with any changes considered appropriate, and recommend that the Shadow Authority delegates authority to the Executive Director for Legal & Governance in consultation with the Group Leaders to finalise the Schedule of Meetings 2027/28. This is not the recommended option as the proposals have been designed to fit together within the schedule and an alteration to one aspect could affect other aspects of the schedule.

9.3 Option 3: endorse the proposed principles, with or without any changes considered appropriate, but agree not to delegate the approval of the final Schedule of Meetings and consequently require the final decision to be made by the Shadow Authority. This is not recommended as it will delay the final agreement of the Schedule of Meetings for 2027/28, thereby reducing the notice members have to make arrangements to attend meetings from 1 April 2027.

9.4 Option 4: endorse the proposed principles, with or without any changes considered appropriate, but proceed with alternative arrangements for meeting venues, for example by replicating the arrangements in the shadow period for all meetings of a committee to be held at a specified predecessor council building. This is not recommended for the reasons set out earlier in the report.

10 Issues for consideration

10.1 Financial Implications

10.1.1 There could be additional costs associated with holding meetings outside of regular working hours, such as building security, utilities costs, and staff overtime costs.

10.1.2 The timing of meetings could impact the cost of travel claims by members, for example the reimbursement of taxi fares in evenings when public transport is less readily available.

10.1.3 Holding meetings at Millmead House in Guildford may also generate additional officer travel expenses where staff are based elsewhere. These costs will need to be assessed under the applicable terms and travel expenses policies and reflected in the relevant budget.

10.1.4 The Members' Allowances Scheme identifies two types of child and dependants' allowances. Whilst childcare is linked to a fixed rate, specialist care can be reimbursed at cost upon production of receipts, which may result in higher rates depending upon when the provision of specialist care is typically more expensive.

10.2 Section 151 Officer Commentary

10.2.1 West Surrey will operate in a very challenging financial environment, with significant budgetary pressures and limited financial resources from 2027/28 (Vesting Day), coupled with increasing demand and costs of services, and reducing government funding. West Surrey Council will be increasingly reliant on Council Tax as the primary source of income.

10.2.2 Decisions made by the sovereign councils in West Surrey and the West Surrey Shadow Authority will need to consider the ongoing financial impact and ensure that expenditure does not exceed the resources available. It is vital that significant importance is placed on effective financial management and medium-term financial sustainability to deliver a balanced budget going forwards and protect service delivery.

10.2.3 Any costs associated with holding committee meetings needs to be quantified and anything over and above current costs will need to be factored into the budget.

10.3 Legal Implications

10.3.1 The timing of local authority committee meetings is not prescribed by statute and is a matter for each authority to determine, but the arrangements must be sufficient to enable the authority to discharge its functions effectively and in accordance with public law principles.

10.3.2 Committee meetings should support timely decision making on key matters ahead of vesting day.

10.4 Monitoring Officer Commentary

10.4.1 Having a scheduled of meetings established for the year provides clarity and certainty to enable councillors and officers to schedule their own diaries but also to provide notice for the public to engage with decision making meetings of West Surrey Council.

10.4.2 The Council Procedure Rules still provide sufficient flexibility to ensure that meetings may be cancelled for lack of business or in an emergency and also that additional meetings may be convened on proper notice where the business of the Council requires it.

10.5 People/Human Resources Implications

10.5.1 The timing, frequency and location of meetings will affect the working arrangements of officers required to attend, support and advise those meetings. This includes officers from Democratic Services and other services who may be required to attend outside their usual working hours.

10.5.2 Evening meetings may require appropriate arrangements for working hours, overtime or time off in lieu. When allocating staff, consideration should also be given to caring responsibilities, flexible working arrangements and reasonable adjustments. Arrangements should take account of any additional travel time associated with attending the meeting venue and allow for appropriate breaks and rest between working commitments.

10.5.3 Democratic Services officers and other officers required to support meetings are not all currently based at Millmead House, Guildford. Holding meetings there may therefore require travel away from their normal work base, with implications for travel time, staff availability and travel expenses. Any entitlement to reimbursement, including where officers travel directly from home rather than from their normal work base, will need to be assessed against the applicable contractual terms and travel expenses policies, taking account of their normal home-to-work journey where required.

10.5.4 The designation of Millmead as the meeting venue does not, in itself, change officers' contractual work bases. Practical arrangements should

also address safe travel, public transport availability, lone working, building security and access to facilities and technical support.

10.5.5 The overall number and distribution of meetings will determine the officer resource required and could place pressure on small specialist teams where meetings are concentrated or require consecutive evening commitments. Regular requirements to work outside normal hours or travel significant distances may also affect the accessibility and attractiveness of meeting support roles for existing and prospective employees. Reasonable notice and a balanced distribution of meetings will help the council manage resources effectively, support recruitment and retention, maintain resilience and allocate evening work fairly.

10.6 Equality and Diversity Implications

10.6.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

(a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
(b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
(c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

10.6.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

10.6.3 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment Screening Tool has been used to identify potential impacts (Appendix 4). This indicates that the various proposals set out within this report could potentially have an adverse impact on any people with a particular protected characteristic. A summary of the potential areas for consideration can be found below.

10.6.4 Holding meetings during the daytime will potentially impact on councillors of working age and be a barrier to them being able to attend. However, evening meetings could also impact on older people who may have concerns about travelling at night and there could be a perception of increased health and safety risks.

10.6.5 Residents may experience a similar impact with regards to ability to attend meetings in the working day and staff may also share concerns about travel and personal safety for attendance at evening meetings.

10.6.6 There could be an impact on residents, councillors and staff with disabilities with regards to meetings being held in the evening with

some not wanting to have to travel at night or not having access to support services to enable them to attend and participate in an evening meeting.

10.6.7 There are also considerations to be made regarding religion and belief as evening meetings could potentially have an impact on Muslim councillors during Ramadan. It is not proposed to schedule meetings on Fridays, therefore avoiding any impact on Muslim councillors or residents.

10.6.8 Personal safety is another area that could have an impact and in particular women could potentially be impacted as some may feel unsafe attending a meeting taking place in the evening including the associated travel to and from the meeting. This could also be applied to pregnant and/or breastfeeding mothers.

10.6.9 The approach proposed is to schedule meetings at a variety of times on different days, thereby mitigating the impact on any particular group.

10.6.10 The decision to hold meetings at the Civic Headquarters could impact specific groups. In particular, this decision could impact officers or residents with a disability and their ability to attend public meetings in person.

10.7 Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

10.7.1 The timing of meetings could impact members' options in relation to opting to use sustainable forms of transport.

10.8 Stakeholders Implications

10.8.1 The principles for meeting schedule have been designed with residents' and stakeholders' needs as a key consideration. For example, it is proposed to hold Planning Committee meetings, which typically see higher levels of community engagement, in the evenings. Conversely, it is proposed to hold Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, which are often attended by partner organisations and other stakeholders, during the working day.

10.8.2 It is recognised that Town and Parish councils' meetings are held in the evening and any decisions to hold West Surrey meetings in the evenings could impact dual-hatted councillors' ability to attend meetings of both authorities.

11 Overview & Scrutiny Comments

11.1 Not applicable.

12 List of Appendices

12.1 Appendix 1- summary of the outcomes of the member survey on meeting time availability.

12.2 Appendix 2 – Proposed Principles for scheduling of West Surrey Council meetings.

12.3 Appendix 3 – Background Research and Best Practice Case Studies

12.4 Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment screening tool.

13 List of Background papers

13.1 None