

Background research and best practice case studies

This appendix sets out research and current thought in this area, including both barriers to participation and examples of good practice, to identify principles that encourage inclusivity for elected representatives and potential candidates.

Although the amount of research in this area is surprisingly modest, useful practice, thought and guidance does exist from which some important general principles can be drawn. There is also helpful consideration, and application, of the issues in Welsh local authorities where [regulations](#) and associated [statutory guidance](#) has been issued, to which (Welsh) local authorities must have regard in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings of a local authority are held.

Examples of research and best practice has also been drawn from those unitary authorities created since 2020 as part of local government change programmes, namely Buckinghamshire, North Northamptonshire, West Northamptonshire, Cumberland, Westmorland & Furness, North Yorkshire, and Somerset.

Groups with the potential to be negatively impacted by meeting start times

1. **Women in local government** - In 2017 a report was published in England – [The Final Report of the Local Government Commission by the Fawcett Society](#) - looking at barriers to the participation of women in local government and amongst its findings said that:

“Many women councillors face significant barriers from the inflexibility of meeting times, and almost two thirds of women councillors feel that changing this will bring more women in....”
2. **People with caring responsibilities in local government** - People with caring responsibilities also face barriers to meeting attendance where they have to arrange care for others in their place.
3. **People with disabilities in local government** - While accessibility, not for consideration in this report, is key to inclusion for those councillors with a physical disability, the Fawcett report, when considering timings of meetings refers to those councillors who have *“chronic or fluctuating conditions such as Crohn’s disease or ME”* and found that for these people *“the inflexibility of meeting times was an issue”*.
4. In its official [LGA Toolkit for Disabled Councillors](#), the Association also emphasises that rigid start times penalise councillors managing chronic, variable, or energy-limiting health conditions.
5. **People in paid employment in local government** - Many councillors will undertake their public duties alongside paid employment, and this balance can be difficult where meeting times are not carefully considered, for example some councillors may find it difficult to attend daytime meetings.

Potential mitigations

6. **Support to attend meetings for those in employment** - Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 entitles councillors to time off for public duties but in practice this will often require leave to be booked, and some employers are more sympathetic to this requirement than others.
7. **Consultation and flexibility** - The Fawcett and the LGA toolkit both recommend that councils should consult on meeting times before agreeing any schedule and that this schedule should be properly tailored to take into account the survey results. In Wales, this is already included in statutory guidance with councils being expected to survey their councillors at least once per term, shortly after each election, to assess their preferences and be committed to act on the conclusions.
8. **Further considerations** - In 2012, a Parliamentary Select Committee (Communities and Local Government) heard evidence from the Chair of a previous commission on a similar topic of Councillor representation. While the evidence was some time ago, it is still relevant. Dame Jane Roberts said of that Commission:

“We recommended that councils should adopt modern business and meeting processes which seek to remove potential barriers to participation. These should include accessible meeting times (not necessarily in the day, and with specified end times), efficient chairing, the use of modern technology where appropriate, support for childcare, and concise paperwork. We felt strongly that councillors should be able to work in a variety of other employments, have domestic commitments, and be a councillor”
9. These recommendations show that there are various considerations and mitigations that should be considered to ensure that local government is as inclusive as possible, with meeting times forming part of that picture.
10. One matter not considered in this report but widely supported as key to inclusivity is the ability of councils to hold hybrid meetings – the government has indicated that it intends to legislate for such meetings but as yet has not and those committees convened under the powers of the Local Government Act 1972 must meet in-person.
11. Equalities information should also be considered in order that the needs of not only current councillors, but prospective candidates and members of the public are also taken into account.
12. A variety of meeting times is likely to be most beneficial taking into account the types of meetings, numbers and types of attendees (including councillors, officers and witnesses) and the volume of democratic meetings for the whole authority.
13. Best practice also suggests that a guillotine be provided for in the council’s constitution and adhered to in meetings.

14. Practically, any consultation and proper consideration of the results, will take time to undertake and would lend itself more reasonably to the agreement of times for the meetings post vesting day (1 April 2027).
15. In addition, a deferred decision on meeting times would allow for a clearer picture on hybrid meetings to emerge as this could influence decision making on the matter.

The government has said that:

“The government is of the view that in-person authority meetings remain vital for local democracy, but that hybrid and remote attendance, and proxy voting, will enable local authorities in England to develop more modern, accessible, and flexible working practices.

We have carefully considered arguments for and against remote attendance and proxy voting, and we plan to legislate to support permanent provision in relation to both policies, when parliamentary time allows.”