

6.1 COUNCIL MEETING COMMENCEMENT TIMES

Ward: (All Wards) (Governance)

Disclosure of Interest: Nil

Authorised Officer: (Executive Manager Corporate)

KEY ISSUES

- City of Swan Council Meetings commence at 5.30pm and have done so for a number of years.
- A motion was passed at a Special Meeting of Electors *'that future meetings of Council commence at 6.30pm'*.
- Both Councillor and public participation needs to be considered when determining Council meeting times. Council's foremost consideration in setting meeting times should be the availability of Councillors.
- A commencement time of 5.30pm is considered the most appropriate Council meeting time.

It is recommended that the Council continue to commence all Council Meetings at 5.30pm.

BACKGROUND

Council meetings have commenced at 5.30pm for a significant number of years. The current meeting commencement time of 5.30pm has worked effectively and efficiently during this time.

At a Special Meeting of Electors held on 19 May 2014 the following motion was passed:

That future meetings of Council and Electors commence at 6.30pm.

This motion was considered in a report to Council on 16 June 2014 when Council resolved to:

- 1) *Refer the matter of meeting commencement times to the CEO and request that this matter to be the subject of a detailed report addressing advantages and disadvantages being presented for consideration.*

This matter was referred back to Council on 10 September 2014 and Council resolved to:

- 1) *Make no change to the current Ordinary Meeting of Council commencement time.*
- 2) *Note the City will commence survey forms for each Ordinary Council Meeting, as well as an on-line survey, to gather data for the future Council consideration.*
- 3) *Note the new Council will consider a report on matters regarding Council meeting process and procedure to be implemented for any new entity following the 2015 local government ordinary elections.*

Local government reform did not proceed. It was determined that Council meeting times would still be considered following the 2015 local government ordinary elections.

Council meeting dates for 2015 were determined on 12 August 2015. Council did not determine times on that date.

DETAILS

It is a legal requirement that all decisions made on behalf of the local government are to be made at meetings called and convened under the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act). The time Council meetings should be held is not covered in the Act or any Regulations.

In setting meeting times consideration needs to be given to both Councillor and public participation.

Councillor Participation

Council's foremost consideration in setting meeting times should be the availability and convenience of Councillors. One of the roles of Councillor is to participate in the decision making processes at Council meetings. Maximum Councillor attendance is important for rigorous debate and decision making.

A review of Councillor attendance at Council meetings over the previous 12 months indicates attendance at Council meetings has been very positive. It is rare that apologies and late attendance occurs (8 apologies and 1 late attendance was registered in the 12 months to September 2015). This indicates that the current meeting time is an optimum time for Councillor attendance.

Council should promote opportunities for a diverse Council and earlier meeting times encourage participation from a diverse section of the community (a compromise for full-time workers, part-time workers, parents of young children, carers, shift workers etc.)

Council also needs to consider the suitability of meetings that extend into the late evenings. Longer meetings, if started later, will extend into the evening and night.

Public Attendance and Participation

Council meetings are open to the public to attend and observe proceedings. Public question time is required to be provided (in accordance with the Act) and the Council also provides the opportunity for members of the public make public statements on items of a general nature and make deputations on items listed on an agenda. The opportunities provided at a Council meeting are not the only means for members of the public to engage with Council and the City:

- Submissions and comments on matters for Council consideration can and should be made as part of public consultation opportunities so that comments can be properly addressed in the report prepared for Council consideration.
- Questions can be submitted to the City at any time.
- Opportunities exist to contact and discuss concerns directly with Councillors and City staff.
- In the future, there may be other opportunities for participation through technology and improved stakeholder engagement etc.

Meeting times of Council are after hours and should be optimised for all the community, not just full time workers. Any one meeting time will not suit all sections of the community. Earlier meeting times encourage participation from a diverse section of the community (a compromise for full-time workers, part-time workers, parents of young children, carers, shift workers etc.)

Local government decision making processes are comparatively accessible to the public. State and Federal governments and bodies and agencies such as the State Administrative Tribunal, Development Assessment Panels etc. all typically sit or require attendance during office hours and have limited opportunities for members of the public to address them.

The majority of Swan residents and ratepayers will attend Council meetings only once or occasionally in relation to one or a few items that affect them directly. Therefore requiring them to make arrangements to attend at an earlier time is not considered onerous.

CONSULTATION

Two separate surveys regarding Council meeting times were conducted to gauge the community's preference. Respondents may have responded to each survey and as individuals were not required to identify themselves, there may be some duplication of responses between surveys. The small number of responses received may not be a representative sample.

Survey 1 – October and November 2014

Available online and at Council meetings during October and November 2014

- 48 responses were received.
- The majority of responses were received from residents of Guildford, South Guildford and Midland. Other responses were received from residents in Aveley, Ballajura, Baskerville, Bellevue, Bullsbrook, Caversham, Ellenbrook, Hazelmere, Henley Brook, Stratton, Swan View, West Swan and Woodbridge and other local government districts (five).
- 62% of respondents had attended a Council meeting in the preceding twelve months, 38% of respondents had not attended a Council meeting.
- Of those that had attended a Council meeting, 30% of respondents indicated they had attended 1-3 meetings. 12.5% had indicated they had attended seven or more meetings.
- Preferred commencement times were as follows:

5.30pm	4.2%
6pm	20.8%
6.30pm	62.5%
7pm	4.2%
Not specified	8.3%

- If meetings commenced later than 5.30pm, 80% responded they were likely or highly likely to attend.

Survey 2 – June to August 2015

Available online and at Council meetings from 19 June 2015 to 7 August 2015. The survey was advertised via public notice in all community newspapers circulating in the district, posters at all City libraries and the Rural Place Office and on the City's website. In addition direct notice was sent to approximately twenty identified ratepayer groups and associations.

- 31 responses were received.
- The majority of responses were received from residents of Guildford, South Guildford and Midland. Other responses were received from residents in Bellevue, Brigadoon, Bullsbrook, Ellenbrook, Middle Swan, Hazelmere and another local government district (one).
- 70% of respondents had attended a Council meeting in the preceding twelve months.
- Of those that had attended a Council meeting, 31.9% had attended 1-3 meetings, 40.9% had attended 4-6 meetings and 27.2% indicated that had attended 7 or more.
- Preferred commencement times were as follows:

5.30pm	0%
6pm	16.2%
6.30pm	54.8%
7pm	12.9%
7.30pm	6.5%
Not specified	9.6%

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

City's Strategic Community Plan 2012 - 2022 / Key area: Governance

STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Act 1995

Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Minimal to nil.

If Council were to set meeting commencement times later than 5.30pm minimal additional salary expenses would be anticipated and flexible working arrangements could be utilised. This is not considered a significant consideration in determining meeting times.

VOTING REQUIREMENTS

Simple majority

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council resolve to:

- 1) Note the results of the public surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015.
- 2) Continue to commence all Council Meetings at 5.30pm.