

6.3 COUNCIL MEETING COMMENCEMENT TIMES

Ward: (All Wards) (Governance)

Disclosure of Interest: Nil

Authorised Officer: (Executive Manager Corporate)

KEY ISSUES

- At a Special Meeting of Electors held on 19 May 2014 a motion was passed that meetings commence at 6.30pm.
- The current commencement time of 5.30pm has been in place for a significant number of years and has worked effectively and efficiently during this time.
- In determining meeting times, consideration needs to be given to the impact for Councillors given their other obligations and the ability for interested members of the public to attend.
- It has been the experience of the City that public attendance at Council meetings is linked to interest in a specific matter before Council rather than regular attendance for general interest.
- Council could consider an amendment for Council meetings to commence at 6.30pm or an alternative time and this could be undertaken on a trial basis.
- With an announcement on local government boundaries imminent and given the new entity will be required to consider its meeting structure and process, it is considered pre-emptive to make changes at this time.
- Public consultation will occur in the form of a questionnaire at Council meetings and on-line survey to assist with the new entity's decision.

It is recommended that the Council make no change to the commencement time for Ordinary Meetings of Council.

BACKGROUND

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

Future meetings of Council and Electors commence at 6.30pm.

The consideration of the motions of the Special Meeting of Electors was considered at the Ordinary Council Meeting held on 18 June 2014 and in regard to this motion, referred the matter to the CEO for a report addressing advantages and disadvantages to be presented to Council for consideration.

DETAILS

Ordinary Council Meetings and the majority of Electors meetings of the City 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. Until recently the City had not received any significant comment on the commencement time or any request for change.

Council adopted the 2014 Ordinary Council Meeting dates, times and place at its meeting of 24 July 2013 and subsequently gave local public notice of these details. Any change to the date, time or place of meetings previously given requires that further local public notice is to be given.

A very important role of local government is to effectively engage with and observe Council meetings, to facilitate good government. Although there is a rigid and formal structure to these meetings, the City needs to find ways that assist in greater understanding and engagement. This is not limited to meeting times and the City is investigating mechanisms to achieve this in a variety of ways.

In setting times for meetings consideration is given to:

1. Impact for Councillors. Councillors in Western Australia are not full time. The majority of City of Swan Councillors work full time and have family responsibilities. They attend to Council obligations in addition to these roles. Councillors' duties are not limited to Council meetings and in many cases, the majority of week nights and some weekends are occupied with Council obligations.
2. The ability of interested parties and members of the public to attend. The public are encouraged to attend Council meetings to observe proceedings.

It is essential that the time of Council meetings is suitable for Councillors as they are the elected representatives of the community and decisions on City business can only be made when they meet at Council. All Councillors have undertaken to be available and attend Council meetings as advised when taking on their role as a Councillor and as scheduled each year. These times are also explained at Prospective Councillors' Seminar prior to the Council election. In looking at the time commitment required for Council meetings alone, approximately one third of meetings have run for one hour, a third for one and a half hours and a third for two to two and a half hours.

Public attendance at Council meetings in the past 12 months has ranged from 3 to 75 (approximately) people with an average of 35 people attending. It has been the experience of the City that public attendance at Council meetings is linked to interest in a specific matter before Council rather than regular attendance for general interest. Due to attendance linked to specific issues, officers found it difficult to develop a meaningful consultation process in the short term.

An investigation of the practices of a number of local governments in the metropolitan area shows that local governments within the metropolitan area have differing meeting commencement times ranging from 6.00pm to 7.30pm. A number of regional local governments commence meetings at 5.30pm and some conduct meetings during standard business hours i.e. between 8.00am and 5.00pm. Therefore, individual Councils determine meeting times to suit their local government.

Officers also considered it prudent to take into account the meetings that are scheduled to occur on the same nights as Council meetings e.g. Tenders Review Committee, Place meetings, etc. The current meeting time is best suited to facilitate a number of meetings held prior to the Council meeting.

Council could consider an amendment to commencement time to 6.30pm as requested or an alternative time. If Council wish to undertake such a change, it is recommended this be conducted for a trial period, given the imminent local government reform. While a later commencement time for meetings may encourage attendance by some sections of the community, it may not suit all. The trial could be used to gauge a preferred time for Councillors and community to attend meetings.

A meeting commencement time of 6.30pm will require the rescheduling of adjoining meetings and will result in the majority of Council meetings concluding by 8.30pm (based on current durations). Given the majority of Councillors undertake their Council role in addition to full time work, a later start time for Council meetings is likely to have an impact for Councillors and staff.

Due to the later finish of Council meetings, a meal will be required to be served prior to the commencement of the meeting. This will impact the scheduling of other meetings and potentially the ability of Councillors to attend these meetings.

Officers consider the provision of a meal prior to the commencement of a Council meeting may give rise to a perception that Councillors discuss and consider agenda items outside of the formal decision making process.

Any amalgamation and boundary change as a result of local government reform will result in a large 'new' local government, both in terms of geographic size and population. A new entity will be required to consider meeting structure and process to suit the 'new' local government.

A report will be prepared for the LIC to consider the entire Council meeting process which will include meeting times, location and operation. To ensure meaningful community input, the City will commence a short survey at each Council meeting as well as online that will gather information in regard to Council meeting times. In this way the City can gather information from both people that have attended meetings, and those that may wish to attend meetings in the future. Other consultation mechanisms were considered by officers, such as sample telephone surveys, but the likelihood of obtaining a sample of people who had attended or wished to attend a Council meeting was considered to be low.

Given the information above, officers do not recommend to make any significant changes at this time. Matters regarding this new entity will be required to be considered as part of the Shire of Mundaring and City of Swan Local Implementation Committee (LIC).

CONSULTATION

Nil to date.

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

Nil

VOTING REQUIREMENTS

Simple majority

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council resolve 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.