

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| COMMITTEE       | Council                        |
| DATE            | 6 October 2010                 |
| DIRECTOR        | Stewart Carruth                |
| TITLE OF REPORT | Start Time of Council Meetings |
| REPORT NUMBER:  | CG/10/177                      |

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report discusses the possibility of continuing the 10.30am start time for Council meetings indefinitely, following a review of the last four ordinary Council meetings.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Council agree that Council meetings, with the exception of the Budget meeting in February, start at 10.30am until further notice.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

### 4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The length of Council meetings has been an issue in terms of the health and safety of both officers and elected members, particularly when meetings have started at 2.00pm and finished late at night. The same principles apply in relation to work-life balance.

There is undoubtedly a risk to the Council if vitally important decisions for the city continue to be taken by members towards the end of long meetings late at night when appropriate due diligence could be sacrificed in the interests of bringing the meeting to a conclusion.

### 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

At the Council meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2010 it was agreed that Council meetings would continue to start at 10.30am up to and including the meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2010. It was also agreed that officers would monitor the length of meetings, reporting to the October meeting, with a view to returning to a 2.00pm start if business appeared to be conducted within reasonable timescales.

Ordinary Council meetings started at 2.00pm for many years until June 2009, when a 10.30am start was introduced on a trial basis following a succession of lengthy meetings and a particularly turbulent previous meeting. All ordinary Council meetings have started at 10.30am since June 2009.

The following table provides some data pertaining to the last four ordinary Council meetings. The number of reports column stipulates the number of written reports on the agenda - this does not include minutes, business statement, questions, motions and so on, where, generally speaking, little time is spent on those items. The length of meeting column does not include meal breaks or adjournments.

| <b>Meeting</b>               | <b>Number of reports</b> | <b>Length of meeting</b> | <b>Time the meeting finished</b> | <b>Time the meeting would have finished if 2.00pm start</b> |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2010  | 4                        | 3 hours and 10 minutes   | 1.40pm                           | 5.10pm  |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2010    | 3                        | 8 hours                  | 7.30pm                           | 11.00pm   |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2010   | 10                       | 10 hours                 | 9.30pm                           | 1.00am  |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> August 2010 | 4                        | 5 hours and 35 minutes   | 5.30pm                           | 9.00pm  |

As can be seen from the above table, the volume of Council business has not been particularly excessive; however there have been a number of contentious issues that members have spent a considerable length of time debating. The following table shows how many members have contributed to the debates on these issues. Each member is entitled to speak for a maximum of five minutes, or ten minutes if moving a motion or an amendment and an additional five minutes permitted to sum up.

| <b>Meeting</b>              | <b>Item of business</b>                                   | <b>Number of members taking part in the debate</b> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2010 | Craigton Road (Nursing Home) Planning Application         | 17   |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2010   | Aberdeen City Centre - Developing a Vision for the Future | 31 (motion and five amendments)                    |

| <b>Meeting</b>               | <b>Item of business</b>  | <b>Number of members taking part in the debate</b> |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2010   | Referral from Development Management Sub Committee - Oakbank School Site | 16   |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2010   | Referral from Finance and Resources Committee - Employment Costs         | 14   |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2010   | The City Garden Project - Next Steps                                     | 21<br>(motion and two amendments)                  |
| 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2010   | Homelessness Service Provision   | 14   |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> August 2010 | Aberdeen Local Development Plan  | 20<br>(motion and five amendments)                 |

Contentious issues frequently attract requests for deputations and there have been nine such requests across the last four meetings, of which seven were accepted. Deputations are entitled to speak for a maximum of ten minutes, following which a maximum of ten additional minutes are permitted for elected members to ask questions of the deputation. Five of the seven deputations heard by the Council related to the City Garden Project. Following the Council decision of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010 to receive quarterly reports on the City Garden Project, it is eminently possible that each report will trigger a number of requests for deputations.

In terms of Standing Orders, the Lord Provost has the power to determine the start time of Council meetings, and although he has indicated in the past that he prefers a 10.30am start, the Lord Provost has been willing to waive this power in order for the Council to decide on the matter as a whole.

It is acknowledged that the 10.30am start time does not favour those members in full-time employment, however until such time that it can be demonstrated that Council business can be disposed of within a reasonable length of time, returning to a 2.00pm start is not practical unless, for example, a very long meeting was to adjourn and return to conclude business the following day (or the next available opportunity) - although this has happened in the past it is by no means ideal in terms of diary availability and business continuity.

6. IMPACT

The start time of Council meetings will be of interest to members of the public who take an interest in local democracy. Council meetings do tend to attract more members of the public than committee meetings due to the higher profile nature of the business being considered. Whilst a 10.30am start may suit some, a 2.00pm start is likely to be favoured by those in full-time employment. One thing that is clear however, is that attendance at Council meetings greatly reduces the longer the meeting goes on irrespective of when the meeting starts.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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