

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25 June 2026

Part 1 - Public

Recommendation to Council



Cabinet Member	Councillor Matt Boughton, Leader
Responsible Officer	Adrian Stanfield, Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive; and Joy Ukadike, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Report Author	Allison Parris, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Review of Rules for Convening Meetings

1 Summary and Purpose of Report

1.1 Members are asked to consider:

- whether there should be any changes to the Borough Council's current start times for meetings; and
- whether there should be a pre-determined end time introduced to ensure meetings conclude within a reasonable timeframe, which lessens the impact on Councillors and Officers work schedules and personal lives.

1.2 This report examines the merits and challenges of daytime and evening committee meetings and provides a comparative overview of meeting start times across neighbouring authorities in West and wider Kent.

1.3 Data was compiled with assistance from AI based on published agendas, calendars and meeting practice. This data has been manually checked for accuracy.

1.4 Published Constitutions were reviewed in respect of meeting durations and finish times.

2 Corporate Strategy Priority Area

2.1 Efficient services for all our residents, maintaining an effective council.

2.2 A review of the rules for convening meetings will ensure efficient management of Council agendas in a timely manner, support effective decision making, improve

the accessibility of meetings for members of the public and support health and safety considerations for staff, Members and the public.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider whether to introduce an earlier start time (to be recommended by the Committee) for all evening meetings of the Borough Council;
- 3.2 If an earlier start-time is recommended under 3.1, consider whether this should be subject to a trial period;
- 3.3 Retain the ability to agree a start time earlier than as agreed in 3.1 in exceptional circumstances, on a case-by-case basis, and in consultation with the relevant Chair;
- 3.4 Members are asked to consider whether there should be a cut off time by which all evening meetings of the Borough Council should finish and recommend to Council that the Constitution be amended accordingly; and
- 3.5 Members are asked to consider whether a vote should be taken to extend the meeting for a further 30 minutes to conclude the matter already under discussion if a pre-determined end time is introduced and recommend to Council that the Constitution be amended accordingly.

4 Introduction and Background

- 4.1 As a result of recent high profile late finishing meetings, concerns were raised that lengthy discussions were not necessarily an efficient use of time for both Councillors and Officers.

The following meetings have finished after 2200 hours during 2024/25 and 2025/26:

- Area 2 Planning Committee – 21 February 2024 (finished at 2210 hours);
- Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 22 April 2024 (finished at 2300 hours);
- Area 2 Planning Committee – 18 September 2024 (finished at 2242 hours);
- Finance, Regeneration and Property Scrutiny Select Committee – 19 November 2024 (finished at 2200 hours);
- Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee – 3 December 2024 (finished at 2200 hours, having started at 1850 hours);
- Area 2 Planning Committee – 4 December 2024 (finished at 2203 hours, having started at 1830 hours);
- Area 2 Planning Committee – 15 January 2025 (finished at 2305 hours, having started at 1830 hours);
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 January 2025 (finished at 2235 hours);

- Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee – 12 February 2025 (finished at 2200 hours);
- Council – 18 February 2025 (finished at 2340 hours);
- Area 2 Planning Committee – 2 April 2025 (finished at 2212 hours);
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 3 April 2025 (finished at 2230 hours);
- Council – 8 April 2025 (finished at 2342 hours);
- Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee – 20 May 2025 (finished at 2221 hours);
- Parish Partnership Panel – 29 May 2025 (finished at 2210 hours);
- Council – 8 July 2025 (finished at 2305 hours);
- Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee – 15 July 2025 (finished at 2230 hours);
- Area 3 Planning Committee – 29 January 2026 (finished at 2208 hours);
- Area 2 Planning Committee – 18 February 2026 (finished at 2349 hours);
- Area 3 and Area 2 Planning Committees – 9 March 2026 – (finished at 2317 hours, with Area 3 having started at 1730 hours); and
- Council – 12 May 2026 (finished at 2203 hours).

4.2 In summary, the statistics identify 21 meetings between February 2024 and May 2026 that finished at or after 10.00pm. The latest recorded finish was 11.49pm for Area 2 Planning Committee on 18 February 2026, followed by Council on 8 April 2025 at 11.42pm and Council on 18 February 2025 at 11.40pm. Late finishes were not isolated to one committee, although Area 2 Planning Committee and Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee featured most frequently.

4.3 There were also concerns raised in respect of the health and safety of Members and Officers impacted by late-running meetings particularly where they were expected to attend work the following day.

4.4 There are a number of considerations that arise in relation to meeting start and end times. For example, meeting times may clash with full time employment responsibilities for Members or those with caring responsibilities outside of normal working hours. Many members also serve on other bodies, e.g. county council/ parish or town councils, and therefore need to attend meetings of those bodies in the evening as well as meet with residents as part of their representative role.

4.5 Changing the starting time for a meeting would not necessarily shorten the length of meetings. However, it might mean that business was concluded earlier in the evening, thereby reducing the risks that arise from meetings extending late into the evening.

5 Comparative Data

5.1 A summary of meeting start times across Kent are detailed in **Annex 1**.

5.2 This illustrates that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council is one of only two councils starting meetings at 7.30pm.

6 Proposal

6.1 Having regard to the comparative position of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council within West Kent, the following options are presented for discussion:

- 1) The current meeting start time of 7.30pm is later than most other Kent authorities and represents the latest routine evening start time within the West Kent area. Therefore, should the Borough Council consider an earlier start time for all committee meetings to provide sufficient time to discuss matters of business fully whilst ensuring reasonable finish times and retaining an evening-based approach;
- 2) If Members wish to explore alternative start times, should a time-limited pilot be considered to enable feedback to be sought from Members, Officers and the public before any permanent changes are made;
- 3) Is there any merit in introducing a specific pre-determined time by which meetings should be finished; and
- 4) If a specific pre-determined end time is introduced should Members have the ability to vote to extend the meeting for a further 30 minutes to conclude the matter already under discussion.

6.2 Any review of meeting start/finish times should reflect Member availability, public attendance and operational impacts for Officers.

6.3 The option to start meetings earlier than any standard start time agreed by Members could be considered in exceptional circumstances, on a case-by-case basis, and in consultation with the relevant Chair.

7 Merits and Challenges

7.1 Evening meetings

7.1.1 These are often an opportunity for those in full time employment to stand for elected office as individuals can only realistically participate in committee meetings outside of their normal working hours, unless they use annual leave or other flexible working arrangements.

7.1.2 This is important because councils gain significant advantages from inclusive representation that mirrors the diversity of their communities, including individuals of working age who are employed.

7.1.3 If membership becomes restricted to those who are retired, independently wealthy or able to negotiate leave from employment, there is a risk that councils become unrepresentative. Evening meetings enable a wider cross section of the

community to consider standing for election which strengthens the quality of democratic debate and decision making and removes visible barriers to participation.

7.1.4 Evening meetings support greater public involvement and attendance and allow Members to fulfil their democratic duties without compromising their professional careers.

7.1.5 Individuals with caring responsibilities during the day may find that evening meetings are more suitable, as they often coincide with times when partners or family members can provide alternative childcare or support.

7.2 Daytime meetings

7.2.1 These enable Councillors to integrate their formal committee responsibilities with other related demands, including other meetings and briefings.

7.2.2 Members can seek clarification of technical points and explore options when Officers are present during working hours. This informal dialogue underpins effective member-officer relations and can produce better-informed decision-making.

7.2.3 For those in employment, evening meetings can mean long working days.

7.2.4 Daytime meetings may better serve other groups currently underrepresented, such as parents with school-age children or those with evening caring responsibilities.

7.2.5 Self-employed people, freelancers and small business owners may also find daytime meetings easier to accommodate than employees of an organisation.

8 Other Considerations

8.1 Both daytime and evening meetings create barriers for different groups.

8.2 The majority of Borough Council meetings operate as a hybrid which makes them easier to access at short notice. However, Members do need to be present in person at meetings to retain their voting rights.

8.3 The majority of Borough Council meetings are available on YouTube which enables the public to watch at any time.

8.4 There could also be an additional pressure for those Members representing parishes when attending both Borough Council and Parish/Town Council meetings in the evening.

8.5 As well as committee meetings and parish/town council meetings, Members are expected to attend other briefing and training sessions. These often arise without

notice and are, therefore, not planned for at the start of the municipal year. This further creates pressure on Councillors time commitments.

9 Key Benefits of a Pre-determined end time

- 9.1 In accordance with their Constitutions, Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council and Gravesham Borough Council have a 10.30 pm deadline for their meetings to finish.
- 9.1.1 Maidstone Borough Council advises that ‘Each unfinished meeting will adjourn at 10.30pm unless a majority of Members present vote to extend the meeting to 11.00pm at which time the meeting will stand adjourned’; and ‘The time and date of the continuation of the adjourned meeting will be decided by a majority of those Members present, or if no decision is reached, by the Proper Officer in consultation with the Mayor and Leader, and it should normally take place within ten (10) working days of the meeting’.
- 9.1.2 Sevenoaks District Council advises that ‘Unless the majority of Members present vote for the meeting to continue, any meeting that extends to 10.30pm will adjourn immediately. Remaining business will be considered at a time and date fixed by the Chairman at the meeting. If the Chairman does not fix a date, the remaining business will be considered at the next ordinary meeting’.
- 9.1.3 Gravesham Borough Council advises ‘that where a Full Council meeting is still in progress after 3 hours or at 10.30pm (whichever is the earlier time) the Mayor will at the first convenient opportunity, draw attention to the time; specify any remaining business which is of such a nature as to justify an adjournment or extension of the meeting; and with the exception of any business so specified, all motions, questions and business remaining to be dealt with shall be deemed to have been moved and seconded and shall be put to the vote in immediate succession and without discussion’.
- 9.2 In accordance with their Constitution, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council advises ‘that an ordinary meeting of the Council, when 4 hours have elapsed after the commencement of the meeting, the Mayor shall put to the vote whether the meeting should continue. If it is agreed not to continue then the remaining items on the agenda will be adjourned to the next meeting.’
- 9.3 In accordance with their Constitution, Thanet Borough Council advises that ‘Unless it is resolved to complete the item under discussion, meetings shall stand adjourned at 10.30pm unless in the opinion of a majority of the Members thereof the business remaining to be dealt with can be concluded by 11.30pm in which case the meeting may continue until 11.30pm at which time it shall automatically stand adjourned.’
- 9.4 A number of benefits could potentially be achieved for the introduction of a pre-determined end time (guillotine) and these are outlined below:

- 1) **Time Management:** It guarantees that meetings end by a specific, pre-determined time, which is particularly beneficial for Councillors/Officers who have to return to work the following morning and who may have lengthy journeys home if they do not live locally.
- 2) **Prioritisation of Business:** By imposing a time limit, the guillotine procedure prioritises the most important and urgent items for decision-making and retains effectiveness.
- 3) **Efficiency:** It incentivises the efficient use of time and can lead to more focused debates.
- 4) **Clarity of Procedure:** Having a clear set of rules for the guillotine helps manage expectations and standardise meeting procedures, which can reduce arguments about process or "points of order".

10 Other Options

- 10.1 Remain with the current convention of starting meetings at 7.30pm and do not implement a pre-determined end time.

11 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 11.1 There would be no additional financial and value for money considerations arising out of amending start or finish times of meetings.
- 11.2 The Borough Council must ensure compliance with the Working Time Regulations 1998 including limits on total hours worked and minimum rest periods for staff.

12 Risk Assessment

- 12.1 An earlier start time might preclude some Members from attending. However, this should be balanced with a later finish time impacting those who need to attend work the next day.

13 Legal Implications

- 13.1 There are certain rules for convening meetings that the Borough Council must follow such as giving notice to the public of the time and place of any meeting.
- 13.2 However, it is up to the local authority to set their own rules and processes for the management of meetings.

14 Consultation and Communications

- 14.1 Discussion with Members via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and regular reporting in advance of any changes to meeting procedures and consequential changes to the Constitution.

15 Implementation

15.1 Any proposed changes to meeting start/finish times could be implemented upon the consequential changes to the Constitution being approved by Council.

16 Cross Cutting Issues

16.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

16.1.1 Limited or low impact on emissions and environment.

16.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report.

16.1.3 Climate change and biodiversity have not been considered as part of this report as proposals relate to current operational matters.

16.2 Equalities and Diversity

16.2.1 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to:

- (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups; and
- (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users.

16.2.2 The impact has been analysed and varies between groups of people.

16.2.3 The results of this analysis are set out immediately below:

- Earlier start times may disproportionately affect some people more than others such as those with young children or other caring responsibilities;
- Support routines may be affected by earlier start times;
- Earlier finish times may improve health and wellbeing.

16.2.4 The impacts identified in the Equality Impact Assessment can be mitigated through a combination of improved consistency, accessible meeting arrangements and ongoing monitoring.

16.2.5 Key actions include:

- Setting clear and consistent start and finish times, including use of a guillotine, to support caring responsibilities, disability-related needs and safe travel.

- Providing early notice of meeting dates and any changes to help Members and officers plan care, travel and support arrangements.
- Enabling access through hybrid/remote options where lawful, alongside ensuring physical accessibility, breaks and suitable facilities for those with disabilities or pregnancy-related needs.
- Monitoring attendance and feedback across protected groups and reviewing impacts after an initial pilot period.

16.2.6 These measures collectively ensure that any disproportionate impacts are identified, mitigated and kept under review while maintaining inclusive decision-making.

16.3 Other If Relevant

- Health and Safety
- Healthy Lifestyles

16.3.1 The timing and duration of Council and Committee meetings have a direct impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of both Members and Officers. Recent late-finishing meetings have raised concerns regarding tiredness, particularly where individuals are expected to attend work the following day or have lengthy journeys home.

16.3.2 Ensuring that meetings conclude at a reasonable hour helps to minimise the risks associated with tiredness, including impaired concentration, reduced decision-making capacity and the potential for unsafe travel home.

16.3.3 Introducing an earlier start time and/or a pre-determined end time would also support improved work–life balance and contribute positively to overall wellbeing.

16.3.4 Establishing clearer expectations regarding meeting length provides predictability, reduces stress, and enables Members and Officers to manage professional and personal commitments more safely and effectively.

Background Papers	N/A
Annex 1	Comparative data