

**COUNCIL**  
**18 April 2023**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REPORT**

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND COMMUNITY & MONITORING OFFICER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL: COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH DENNIS-HARBURG

COUNCIL PRIORITY: **People First**

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 Further to the report in January 2023, this report covers proposed:

- changes of the Area Committees to Area Forums
- grant applications being considered by the Grants Panel
- change of meeting start time to 19:00 (except for those that already start during the daytime such as the Joint Staff Consultative Committee and Cabinet & Licensing Sub-Committees).
- removal of one of the scheduled meetings for Licensing & Regulation Committee
- amendment of the terms of reference for the Council Tax Setting Committee
- noting that Cabinet Panel on the Environment is to be the only remaining Panel for 2023

***This is with the view to arranging a detailed Constitutional review by Members (via Member & officer Working Group), starting on or about July 2024 for Full Council consideration [in early 2025].***

And

- appointment of an additional Deputy Electoral Registration Officer

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

That Full Council:

- 2.1. Approves the change of the Area Committees to informal Area Forums (set out in paragraphs 8.2-8.5) to commence with the new municipal year from May 2023;
- 2.2. [***That subject to the above decision***], approves of the principle that grant applications be considered by the District Wide Community Facilities Capital & Revenue Grants Panel (as set out in paragraphs 8.6-8.11);
- 2.3. Approves a start time of 19:00 for meetings (other than those which already meet in the daytime);
- 2.4. Notes that the Cabinet Panel on the Environment is the remaining Panel for May 2023;
- 2.5. Approves the amendments detailed in **Appendix A** (summarised at paragraph 8.14-8.18)

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<sup>1</sup> Members are asked to take the recommendations to the vote separately

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. To review and look at ways to improve engagement with the community; consider resource issues, reflect good decision-making practice, and keep the Constitution up to date.

### **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1. In respect of recommendations 2.1-2.4 the status quo could be continued; however, these proposals follow consultation with all Group Leaders and specifically then the District Membership (44 Member response rate) and staff consultation. Therefore, these are issues that should be brought before the Membership for formal consideration. In terms of 2.5, Appendix A includes the appointment of a further Deputy Registration Officer (for Elections), and this proposal is to assist with Electoral Registration resilience, as well as some general Committee arrangements changes for two Committees, and therefore no other alternative options are included within the report.

### **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1. Following the consultation mentioned in 4.1, the Leader and Deputy were initially consulted about matters relating to recommendations 2.1-2.4 in 2022 and early 2023. The Conservative Leader was also kept informed during monthly briefings. A copy of this proposed report (as a draft) was also circulated to the Group Leaders for comment on 22 March.
- 5.2. An email was sent to all Members on 30 January 2023 regarding various issues, followed by a MIS reminder on 9 February, with Members invited to complete an online survey regarding Area Forums, meeting times and better engagement, and any other comments or suggestions. 43 District Councillors completed the survey, and 1 commentary email was received. Their anonymised responses are at **Appendix B**. A clear majority (31/44) of those were in favour of changing the Area Committees to Area Forums and 22/44 were prepared to consider earlier meetings of 1800/18:30/19:00 (so for this purpose 19:00 has been chosen as a potential time). Other comments on grants, daytime meetings and Panels are also included. There are some wider engagement issues raised in that – and it would be useful to review those elements generally and how we can continue to engage better in the more comprehensive review from 2024 – when (if at least some of these proposals 2.1-2.3) have been implemented.
- 5.3. The rest of the proposed amendments at Appendix A are request-based (as identified) to facilitate the good administration of the Council.

### **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision, it is a Full Council decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

### **7. BACKGROUND**

#### **Recommendations 2.1-2.4**

- 7.1 The review of arrangements follows general considerations on how and when the Council has meetings / the increasing number of meetings arranged in the evening since 2019,

attendance of those meetings/ engagement considerations and staffing resourcing issues (see also Human Resource implications, paragraph 14).

Formal meetings/ engagement with the community

- 7.2 Since 2019, scheduled meetings for North Herts Council has increased from 68 (64 calendar plus extraordinary/ additional meetings) to 88 in 2020/21 (81 calendar plus extraordinary / additional), 101 in 2021/22 (93 calendar plus extraordinary / additional), and 93 in 2022/23 (85 calendar plus extraordinary/ additional meetings). In simple terms, since 2019 as compared with 22/23, meetings have increased by 37%, delivery of this schedule is with the same allotted resource – however with issues regarding staffing and retention this has been problematic (see paragraph 14). As well as staffing resource, it cannot be ignored that this also has an impact / expectation on the Membership to attend such meetings (especially when they are physically required to attend for formal meetings – see below and legal implications, paragraph 9).
- 7.3 Whilst *direct* comparisons with other Councils is not always straightforward, for those where the information was readily available/ supplied in Hertfordshire, this does not compare favourably<sup>2</sup> with, for example East Herts (57), Stevenage (65<sup>3</sup>), Welwyn Hatfield (62). The Council that had more was the County Council at 133. Whilst the North Herts figures after 2019 *also record the Panel meetings*, this applies to three of the Council figures above, including the County Council, which has a larger staffing resource and Membership. Therefore, North Herts has a very high level of meetings.
- 7.4 Start times of meetings are also covered in the table at 7.5, which is a separate proposal; *however, this is relevant when comparing the number of meetings arranged.*
- 7.5 The table of information sets out comparable information gathered below. Many of the above authorities not only have fewer meetings but start these earlier (which includes the County Council), which is of significance in terms of the potential engagement, resource impacts and Member involvement (and any decision making).

Local Government	Start Times	Latest Start Times	Number of scheduled meetings 2019/20	Number of scheduled meetings 2020/21	Number of scheduled meetings 2021/22	Number of scheduled meetings 2022/23 (as at December 22)
East Hertfordshire	19:00	19:00				57 inc panels
Hertsmere	18:30	19:30				
St Albans	19:00	19:00				65 plus Working group -19
Stevenage	18:00	19:00				
Three Rivers	19:00	19:00				
Watford	19:00	19:30				
Welwyn Hatfield	19:30	19:30				62 inc panels
Hertfordshire County Council	09:30	14:00				Total 133 inc all panels and extraordinaries (not including boards, other than Herts Growth Board as joint Committee).
East Cambridge District	16:30	18:00				
North Herts District Council			Total 68	Total 88	Total 101	Total 93 scheduled/ additional

<sup>2</sup> As at December 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Stevenage had a number of working groups, but their Committee arrangements are different.

### Public attendance/ engagement

- 7.6 With regards to public attendance at meetings, this is not officially recorded and is therefore anecdotal from staff and Members; however, other than certain meetings with key topics for e.g. Planning Control Committee, Overview & Scrutiny – Hitchin Town Hall, Council - Local Plan related, this is often non-existent. Where there is a formal Council, or Committee meeting, these legally have to be in person and public engagement in person.<sup>4</sup> The public can either attend in person or view live or post a meeting via YouTube; they cannot engage/ participate in a formal meeting remotely following the Judicial Review challenge in 2021<sup>5</sup> and subsequent legal advice post this. The public's ability to engage is also through more limited fixed early agenda item public participation speaking 'slots'.
- 7.7 The only exception to this is Licensing Sub-Committee 'hearings', which fall under different legal requirements. In additional informal non-decision-making bodies, such as Panels (or Forums, working groups) do not need to meet in person. These Sub-Committees and Panels have therefore continued to meet virtually since the withdrawal of the Covid flexibility Regulations<sup>6</sup>, effective from 7 May 2021.

### Area Committees/ Area Forums

- 7.8 In respect of Area Committees, these are often preceded by Town Talks, where specific topics are discussed, and issues raised. Engagement varies in different areas and with different topics. As Members are aware, Area Committee meetings start at 1930, and there is limited legal ability to allow the sorts of flexibility, that you can achieve in informal meetings spaces, such as Town Talks, Forums, Panels etc. Most of the decision making is around small local grants – with the expectation that grant applicants attend the meeting to present their application in person. This means those travelling to the venue in the evening, and waiting to present to the Committee, and such process starting on or around 2000 on the agenda, which can be onerous for the applicants as well as the public. Transportation and costs can also be an issue and off-putting (as indeed can a more formalised meeting).
- 7.9 The proposals set out under section 8 below, therefore looks to engage differently, in terms of Area Forums, leading to a more flexible approach, with the benefit of potential hybrid or virtual meetings (for Members and public), topic-based engagement and less staffing resource.

### Grants

- 7.10 Grant allocation is an executive function that can (see legal implications section 9) be awarded by Area Committees. If there is approval to move to Area Forums, then there are two options a) the Forums consider and recommend to the Executive Member (currently Community Engagement), or b) these are considered by the District Wide Community Facilities Grants Panel, who recommend to the Executive Member.

### Meeting times/ numbers of meetings

- 7.11 In terms of meeting start times, those who were Councillors in 2020, will recall that as part of the Local Government Associations ('LGA') Peer Review of 2020, two specific Committees (Overview & Scrutiny and Planning Control Committee) were considered and the LGA Peers recommended that meetings should not be starting as late as 19:30; that

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<sup>4</sup> As per the then QCs advice Mr Peter Oldham – QC instructed in Hertfordshire County Council, Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (et al) -v- Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government [2021] EWHC1093 & Supplementary [2021] EWHC 1145 (Admin).

<sup>5</sup> Hertfordshire County Council (above).

<sup>6</sup> Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

people are tired, late meetings did not make good decisions and that meetings should be brought forward rather than later:

*“...There was a concern around individual personal effectiveness, accessibility, external public perception and health & safety / personal welfare of both members and officers from such excessively long and late meetings. Rather than late meetings, it was noted that working members at another council have chosen to bring meeting start-times forward to 5.20 p.m. to fit in with their professional commitments. Combined with good agenda-planning and an effective forward work-plan, this will avoid excessively late finishes.’*

*“Consider starting meetings earlier. Members and officers are not performing at their best at late night meetings after a full day’s work and there is an increased risk of challenge from applicants if it was perceived that an application had been rushed because of a long meeting.”*

- 7.12 These were considered at the time and the above (and potential cut off times for meetings called a ‘guillotine’), however, they were not taken forward. Subsequently, however, meeting numbers have increased as indicated above and other issues, such as ways to engage and resources have come to the forefront.

#### Panels

- 7.13 Cabinet Panels were originally established following a Constitutional review in 2019/20 (which was informed by a Member/ officer working Group). In the report of 16 January 2020, it was identified that these could have workload impacts, and this would have to be carefully managed (as these involve several departments and officers). Having consulted the Leader and Deputy (and in the light of the feedback from Members in Appendix B), the most effective one appears to be the Cabinet Panel on Environment. Therefore, the decision to note is that this is the only Panel to be taken forward from May 2023 (see legal implications for the reason why this is to note).

#### Recommendation 2.5 - Appendix A

##### Section 8.2.3 Licensing & Regulation Committee -number of meetings

- 7.14 This concerns the number of meetings – currently it is stated that there shall be ‘at least two’.

##### Section 10 - Council Tax setting

- 7.15 This concerns the need or requirement to have a Council Tax Setting Committee decision on Council tax considered after Full Council as part of the Budget setting process.

##### Section 14 Proper Officer functions - Deputy Electoral Registration Officer (‘ERO’)

- 7.16 Currently the Council has one Deputy ERO (the Service Director: Legal & Community), to the ERO (the Democratic Services Manager). The Electoral Commission guidance<sup>7</sup> is that the Council should ensure that it approves the appointment of one or more Deputy EROs who can carry out the duties and powers of the ERO if they are unable to act personally. Duties have recently increased due to the requirements of the Elections Act 2022; therefore, such an additional appointment has been requested.

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<sup>7</sup>[what-resources-do-electoral-registration-officers-need-carry-out-their-role](#)

## 8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. The main proposed changes are detailed below. Members should note that the proposals are not linked – and should be considered separately. *There is no recommendation on daytime meetings*, although the Membership are aware that some formal meetings do currently take place during the day (Joint Staff Consultative Committee, and ad hoc regulatory and Cabinet Sub-Committee meetings).

### **Recommendation 2.1**

#### **Section 9 Area Committees to become informal Area Forums**

- 8.2. Following consultation with Group Leaders and the Membership as a whole, the majority of those that responded to the consultation said that they were in favour of Area Committees becoming more informal Forums (31 cross party), although additionally there were those who said no, but were in favour of abolishing the Area Committees.
- 8.3. The proposal looks to replace the Area Committees with Forums, which can act in the same informal way as Town Talks. These Forums would be much more 'People Focused' engagement events. They would not have to observe the rigidity of the formal Committees meetings and there would be more opportunity to react to the concerns raised from the community. Councillors within the area could choose which concerns they take forward, invite presenters on specific topics and invite representatives from partners and outside organisations such as the Police to present local crime figures. The public could ask questions and this proposal presents the opportunity to create a dynamic and interesting format that the public would be more likely to, and comfortable attending.
- 8.4. It would allow meetings to be arranged at the agreed general time [currently 7.30 pm subject to the vote on recommendation 2.3]. The terms of reference would be largely very similar (albeit more flexible). The makeup of these Forums would be the same (local District Councillors for the area concerned), with an elected Chair and Vice. Meetings could be hybrid, or in person only; however, *Members should note that if so, then the DCO is the only venue that has the IT equipment to support live streaming of any meetings*. There is no additional budget for venues or hiring of equipment for hybrid meetings elsewhere, which can cost [£100-300 per meeting]. However, there is a fixed budget that could be more flexibly applied by the Community & Partnership team, who would be able to consider how best to / on occasion facilitate events within the local community at an accessible community venue to encourage participation on specific topics.
- 8.5. This would remove 20 formal meetings from the calendar of meetings. The Forum terms of reference would be finalised by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Leader and Deputy after this Council meeting and before the election, as it is proposed that these are implemented from the post Annual Council cycle of meeting for 2023/24. These arrangements will be reviewed as part of the 2024 Working Group.

### **Recommendation 2.2**

#### **Grants – considered by an Area Forum or the central grants Panel**

- 8.6. As things stand, community grant applications are either considered by the Area Committees, in between meetings by the Executive Member or the District Wide Grants Panel (District Wide Community Facilities Capital & Revenue Grants Panel –“the Grants Panel”), with referrals to the Executive Member for approval (as this is an Executive Function). The base budget for all the Area Committee grants is £41,700 (split Letchworth

£11,000; Hitchin £11,000; Royston & District £6,000; Southern Rural £8,700; and Baldock £5,000)

- 8.7. If the Area Committees become Forums, then there is a decision as to whether area grants are considered by the Forums or by the Grant Panel.
- 8.8. The Grants Panel originally considered capital applications, then a district revenue pot and also allocated various covid-related / community-based grants over the last few years. This Panel effectively undertakes the pre-Executive decision consideration prior to any Executive Member decision to make the grants, therefore would be a practiced body to consider all grant applications, be they local or District wide. Meeting start times vary (start times 1630-1900) and are real-time virtual ones. If the Grants Panel takes on the previous Area Committee grants, the number of meetings would be 4-5 per year and it would prevent applicants making unnecessary duplicated or similar local area applications. It would reduce the administrative burden for any applicant that wishes to make cross area applications and for the Community & Partnership staff.
- 8.9. The Grants Panel Membership can be made up of the Area Forum Chairs and Vice Chairs (total 10), to ensure Area representation. This would require minor revision to the Terms of Reference currently in place. If the decision is for the grants to go to the Grants Panel, any amendments needed to the Panel terms will be undertaken in consultation with the Leader and Deputy.
- 8.10. If the grant applications went to the Forums, then this would require reports (currently 20 per year) and some presentation to the Forum by the applicants. The applications would be later in the evening and whilst the presentations by applicants could be remote (where the Forum meeting was hybrid or virtual), it would negate the flexibility of the Forum ideal.
- 8.11. The officers' preference (for the budget size, administrative and organisational reasons as indicated above) is for these to be considered by the Grants Panel, and the recommendation is that the Grants Panel should consider the applications. Most Members in the survey appeared, however, to support grants being considered by the Forums. It is nevertheless, in this instance, proposed that this is centralised and at least trialled until the review for 2024/25, and this could revert to the Area Forum after that review, if it was felt that this approach was not working locally.
- 8.12. ***This consideration will only apply if the decision is to go to Area Forums.*** If the vote is in favour of Forums, and there is then the rejection of recommendation 2.2, ***then the default for the Forum's terms of reference will be that Area Forums will consider the grant applications.***

### **Recommendation 2.3**

#### **Earlier meetings**

- 8.13. Members will note the recommendations of the earlier LGA Peer review and those from the survey result indicated that 22 of those who responded would be prepared to accept an earlier meeting. Whilst the Members names have not been included, this was cross party and those from varying working backgrounds. A slightly earlier meeting of 19:00 would correspond to most of the other Councils in Hertfordshire and if necessary, could be trialled until the review of the arrangements which would start in or around July 2024.

## **Recommendation 2.4**

### **Panels**

- 8.14. Nothing further to add to paragraph 7.

## **Recommendation 2.5 Appendix A**

### **Section 8.2.3 – Licensing & Regulation Committee**

- 8.15. Historically one meeting was schedule, which was increased to ‘at least two’ on or about 2019. This second meeting has not been required and is therefore cancelled due to lack of business. Any additional business meeting could be arranged in consultation with the Chair and therefore it is proposed to reduce this down to one, once again.

### **Council tax setting section 10**

- 8.16. As the Council meeting that sets the District budget has moved to late February, it is now possible for that meeting to also set the overall Council Tax (as it takes place after the County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner) have set their precepts. There are two options, one is that the Council Tax Setting Committee takes the decision on setting the overall Council Tax, *unless the decision can be taken by a meeting of Full Council*. The second option set out is that that Council will always set Council Tax and narrow what Council Tax setting Committee will do. The proposal is the former, however, in the event that the Membership proposed that the latter is considered then that will be the one that is put to the vote. Proposed alternative wording is set out in **Appendix A**.

### **Section 14 Proper Officer/ Deputy ERO function**

- 8.17. As indicated above, the Council should ensure they have sufficient Deputy EROs to undertake duties. The new Elections Act 2022 has increased the requirements and obligations on the ERO (for example in relation to voter ID and overseas voters). Any Deputies appointed should have the skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions that they have been assigned. The proposal is to appoint the Electoral Services Manager as another Deputy ERO.
- 8.18. Unlike Returning Officers, the ERO cannot appoint a deputy themselves, unless according to the Electoral Commission, this has been delegated to the ERO, or in their absence or vacancy this can be undertaken by the Proper Officer who appointed the ERO (i.e. the Service Director Legal & Community). No such delegation to the ERO is currently in place, therefore in addition to the appointment of the Electoral Services Manager, and the delegation to appoint any further (appropriately qualified) Deputy EROs is sought. Such a delegation would align with the Returning Officer (‘RO’)s current statutory ability to appoint Deputy ROs and provides for greater flexibility.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **General**

- 9.1. Full Council’s terms of reference include “approving or adopting the Policy Framework”. The Policy Framework includes the Constitution.
- 9.2. Section 37 Local Government Act 2000 requires the Council to have in place a Constitution and to keep that under review. The Local Government Act 2000 section 9P sets out the requirements of a local authority’s Constitution, including the requirements to prepare it and keep it up to date and the requirement to make it available for public inspection.

### **Committees/ grants/ Panels**



- 9.3. In respect of formal Committees, legal requirements apply under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972, in respect of arranging and holding of meetings (summons to such a meeting, set time and place, agenda/ reports and availability of such reports).
- 9.4. A local authority cannot hold such meetings in a hybrid or virtual form as confirmed by the Judicial Review case (*Hertfordshire County Council, Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (et al) -v- Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government [2021] EWHC1093 & Supplementary [2021] EWHC 1145 (Admin)*). Further advice was then obtained from the then QC involved in the case (Peter Oldham) and the advice was that Members and the public would need to attend in person if they wished to ‘participate’, i.e. both would need to be physically present at the Committee to do so.
- 9.5. Decision making is reserved to formal Committees/ Full Council and Cabinet, other informal bodies can act as consideration and recommendation stages. Decisions on Grants are executive functions and can be taken by the Executive (Leader, Executive Member or Cabinet), Area Committees or by Officer. Such decisions cannot be taken by informal bodies, as per the provisions of section 9E Local Government Act 2000 (‘Discharge of functions: general’).
- 9.6. Cabinet Panels are executive non decision making in nature and therefore a decision on discharge of any such related function falls to the Leader, as per 9E above.

### **ERO**

- 9.7. Section 52 Representation of the People Act 1983 — Discharge of registration duties, provides
- (2) Any of the duties and powers of a registration officer may be performed and exercised by any deputy for the time being approved [...]<sup>3</sup>, by the council which appointed the registration officer, and the provisions of this Act apply to any such deputy so far as respects any duties or powers to be performed or exercised by him as they apply to the registration officer.*
- (3) In England and Wales, any acts authorised or required to be done by or with respect to the registration officer may, in the event of his incapacity to act or of a vacancy, be done by [or with respect to]<sup>4</sup> the proper officer of the council by whom the registration officer was appointed.*
- (4) It shall be the duty—*
- (a) in England, of a district council or London borough council,...*  
*to assign such officers to assist the registration officer as may be required for carrying out his functions under this Act.*

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are currently hire costs for 3 venues for the Area Committees of circa £3.5K per annum. This could be applied more flexibly for engagement of the public in Area Forums, where the meetings are undertaken virtually / hybrid / in person fashion mixed topics approach.
- 10.2 Staff that attend evening meeting can apply for a fixed payment and Committee staff / or those dealing with IT related matters, are paid overtime. A reduction in staff involved in the formal meetings would lead to a reduction of such payments (estimate at circa £2K).

## 11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Ensuring the Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place is an important risk mitigation measure. The Council's Constitution is a fundamental part of those governance arrangements.

## 12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Otherwise, no specific equality issues identified.
- 12.2 Area Forums will be able to meet in person, hybrid or virtually although in the first two instances if these are to be live streamed/ YouTube'd these will have to be held in the DCO Council chamber. Informal meetings will be of benefit for those who face difficulties accessing venues / unwilling or unable to access transport.

## 13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this decision as this is not a procurement exercise or contract.

## 14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 Formal staff Consultation was undertaken on proposed changes to Area Committee start times (to make these later) in September – October 2022. It had been informally proposed by some Members that these Committees start later in the evening (20:00 or 20:30). All staff (and Eastern Unison representations) rejected the proposal, and having discussed this with the Leader and Deputy Leader, no further action was taken. In the light of the strong and unanimous response received there is no recommendation for change by Members to later meetings.
- 14.2 One of the proposals during the above consultation, from the then Community Engagement team (now **Community & Partnerships**) was for the Area Committees to become Forums, which would allow for more flexibility, and they could be arranged and run by that team, rather than two teams being involved. The Committee Services team were in favour of this proposal as part of the consultation. Note that a comment was made in Appendix B relating to the officer commitment to engagement/ team and the reorganisation recently. Prior to the February 2023 reorganisation there was a Team Leader and three officers and there will now be a Team Leader with four Community & Partnerships officers – so the resource has in fact been expanded to provide an overall team approach across the District.
- 14.3 Committee Services currently arrange and support the Area Committees with the Community & Partnership team. The former has suffered severe recruitment and retention issues since 2019, never being fully staffed. This year there will continue to be issues with staffing / outstanding post covid leave / and use of staffing for the preparation of the elections in 2024 (which the Committee Services team have traditionally assisted with). As part of the consultation responses and exit interviews with those leaving, the lateness of meeting times was cited as one of the reasons that staff did not wish to continue. The

proposals would reduce the formal meetings down by at least 20, which even with that and Panel reduction would bring the Council in better alignment with the other District/ Borough Councils in section 7.5. A slightly earlier meeting time would also assist with staff welfare and wellbeing and align more effectively with other Councils.

## **15. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 Informal meetings allow for a more flexible approach and virtual / hybrid meetings support the Council's green agenda and declared Climate Change emergency.

## **16. APPENDICES**

- 16.1 Appendix A – schedule of proposed changes.
- 16.2 Appendix B – Member survey results.

## **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 17.1 Constitution & Panels see webpage <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/council-constitution>