

Area South Committee Meeting Review

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Purpose of the Report

To allow Area South committee members to consider the suitability of the current start time and other arrangements for the Area South Committee meeting.

Public Interest

Area South Committee meetings are held in public. This allows residents and others to observe the committee in action and also to make representation. The Area South Committee is held at the Brympton Way, Council Offices on the first Wednesday of every month starting at 2pm, with planning applications being determined last on the agenda.

Recommendation

That Members agree the start time for Area South Committee remain at 2.00pm and that planning applications continue to be determined last on the agenda and not before 3pm to benefit public participation, Member attendance and officer time.

Background

It is good practice to periodically review area committee arrangements. The last review was in September 2015. At that meeting members resolved that the start time for the Area South Committee remain at 2.00pm and for a trial period planning applications be determined last on the agenda and not before 3pm.

Analysis of meetings held since September 2015

Area Committee meetings are a key element of local governance in South Somerset. It is vital that elected members feel able to participate and contribute as fully as possible to local decision making.

Members will be aware that the choice of starting times has always been a matter for each Area Committee to decide. The expectation is that Area Committee meetings are held at a time and place which members feel is best suited to their Area. The result is that the arrangements for all four Area Committees are not the same, with wide variation in “best” practice. It is recognised that arrangements will always involve some compromise.

The structure of the meeting: The following table shows the meeting duration times for Area South Committee from October 2015 to August 2016.

Month	Start (pm)	Finish (pm)	Duration	No. of Planning Applications
2015				
October	2.00	3.55	1.55	NIL
November	2.00	4.25	2.25	1
December	2.00	3.45	1.45	NIL
2016				
January	4.00	5.10	1.10	1
February	2.00	4.45	2.45	1
March	2.00	5.05	3.05	2
April	2.00	3.55	1.55	1
May	Meeting cancelled			
June	2.00	6.10	4.10	5
July	2.00	4.30	2.30	2
August	Meeting cancelled			
September	2.00	6.20	4.20	4

- The average meeting time was 2 hours 40 minutes
- The shortest meeting took 1 hour and 10 minutes
- The longest meeting took 4 hours and 20 minutes

The Chairman and Vice chairman assess the anticipated duration of non-planning items and from this set a realistic start time for any planning applications to be determined. This has been quite accurate throughout. It has been noted that any confidential items should always be taken at the end of the meeting. Councillors views are welcomed on the continuation of non planning items at the start of the Agenda.

Venue: Meeting in Brympton Way affords the most efficient use of officer time. Parking for Councillors and visiting member of the public is usually accommodated well by the current parking arrangements. Members views on how well this works is welcome

Financial Implications

If a later starting time for Area South Committee meetings is agreed by Members, then there may be an impact upon staff overtime if meetings were to continue beyond 6.30pm. This would include Caretaking duties, planning and democratic services officer support to the meetings which would impact upon the budget of each individual service.

Corporate Priority Implications

The work of the Area Committee system is dedicated to promoting all of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

As a Council we promote the use of sustainable transport, however, moving to a later starting time would make to use of public transport more problematic.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None

Background Papers

None