

## **Area West Committee – Review of Arrangements**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To allow Area West Committee Members to consider the suitability of the current start time and other arrangements for the Area West Committee meetings. To agree any changes required for the forthcoming year.

### **Public Interest**

Area West Committee meetings are held in public. This allows residents and others to observe the Committee in action and also to make representations. The Committee is held at various venues on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month starting at 5:30pm, with planning applications being determined last on the agenda.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- 1) The start time for Area West Committee remains at 5:30pm
- 2) The rotation around the most suitable venues in Area West continues, with new venues being trialled where the meeting space meets our criteria.
- 3) The order for the agenda remains the same with planning applications determined in the second half of the meeting

### **Background**

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 in local decision making. It is good practice to periodically review Area Committee arrangements.

The choice of starting times has been a matter for each Area Committee to decide. The expectation is that Area Committee meetings are held at a time and place that Members feel is best suited to their Area. The arrangements for all 4 Area Committees vary widely. It is recognised that any arrangements will always involve some compromise. All meetings are normally held on a Wednesday.

### **Analysis of meetings held since December 2015**

The Democratic Services Officer has produced analysis of the meetings held over the last year to further inform Councillors of issues and trends

Date	Venue	Start	Finish	Duration	Total Reports	Planning
16/12/2015	Council Chamber, B Way	17:30	19:30	2.0	7	1
20/01/2016	Wadham School, Crewkerne	17:30	19:00	1.5	8	1
17/02/2016	Victoria Hall, Crewkerne	17:30	22:00	4.5	10	2
16/03/2016	Swanmead Comm School	17:30	18:50	1.3	5	0
20/04/2016	The Guildhall, Chard	17:30	21:10	3.7	8	2
18/05/2016	Swanmead Comm School	17:30	19:30	2.0	6	1
15/06/2016	The Guildhall, Chard	17:30	21:45	4.3	13	4
20/07/2016	The Guildhall, Chard	17:00	21:00	4.0	8	1
17/08/2016	Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne	17:30	21:15	3.8	10	4
21/09/2016	Meeting Cancelled					
19/10/2016	Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne	18:00	21:20	3.3	8	2
16/11/2016	The Guildhall, Chard	17:30	18:25	0.9	6	0
07/12/2016	Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne	17:30	21:35	4.1	11	5
<b>TOTAL</b>				35.4	100	23

- The average meeting time was 2hrs 55mins
- The shortest meeting took 55mins
- The longest meeting took 4hrs 30mins

Set up/pack away times for each venue, including travel time, loading up/packing away are shown below along with a comparator of the Archie Gooch Pavilion:

Venue	Time	Comment
Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne	4hrs	2 people required for set up due to short availability of hall & the need to set up portable hearing loop. No caretaking – all tables & chairs need to be set up & packed away. Teas can sometimes be provided by the WI. Some health & safety issues due to the need to lock & alarm the building
The Guildhall, Chard	1.5hrs	All caretaking, teas & equipment provided. No lone working or health & safety issues
Swanmead Community School, Ilminster	3.5hrs	Some caretaking provided. 2 Officers required for set up due to need to set up portable hearing loop. Limited on site & adjacent car parking. Lone working not an issue
Archie Gooch Pavilion (Ilminster FC), Ilminster – proposed new venue	3.5hrs	Possibly some caretaking provided. 2 Officers required for set up due to need to set up portable hearing loop

This shows that the most time efficient hall for the Committee is The Guildhall, Chard and the least is the Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne. Venue choices are limited by hall size, acoustics, availability, accessibility & parking. This means that over the past year the Committee has

rotated between 3 main Area West venues. Other halls are evaluated when they become available.

## **Area West Committee Arrangements Survey**

To assist with the decisions over timing, location and order of agenda, a survey was sent to all Area West Councillors. This e-survey highlighted the pros and cons of the various options. Sixteen responses were received so 100% response rate.

**Timing** – there was a majority agreement 68.75% to retain the current arrangement for a 5:30pm start. 18.75% voted for a morning meeting and 12.50% for an afternoon meeting.

Comments included:

- *“working Councillors unable to attend earlier”;*
- *“as a Council we should make the meetings open to all and that includes those who work be it Councillors or members of the public”;*
- *“this suits me best because of work commitments which I am contracted to undertake”;*
- *“I would like to see planning start at 5:30pm. I would then start AWC at 4:00pm to deal with Area matters. This would save Officers’ time and applicants and objectors could still attend after work”;*
- *“could they be in the Lace Mill so that we can have a warm and consistent wifi connection?”;*
- *“out of hours work by staff should be dealt with on a flexi hour system NOT through overtime payments. Most Parishes’ meetings have long been de-conflicted with AWC meetings. Unsure as to what professional advice we have been missing?”;*
- *“there is not a really good time for me but I would prefer a morning, if possible, as I often have other evening commitments and an afternoon start may go on”.*

**Venue** – 9 (56.25%) selected to “continue with the existing arrangement”, 6 (37.50%) chose to “fix” the venue in one optimum venue within Area West (eg: Guildhall, Chard) and one (6.25%) would have preferred Brympton Way. The majority view from Councillors 56.25% was to keep the current arrangements. Cost and time factors were not felt to be sufficiently important by the majority to warrant change. The Democratic Services Officer evaluates alternative venues but only a few are able to meet our essential criteria.

Comments included:

- *“the Area Committees are to enable us to make contact with the people locally, keeping it in Chard or even worse Yeovil, would destroy what we have built up over the years larger planning applications need to be heard in the town relevant”;*
- *“important to retain principle of local decision-making in local area. The Guildhall is well known and parking is adequate and nearby. Henhayes is also a good venue if Guildhall not available”;*
- *“a shame that we no longer go to the villages, but I understand the reasons why we no longer do this”;*
- *“Brympton Way is a no no for Area West and could prove to be the thin end of a very thick wedge!”;*
- *“suggest Chard is the primary routine location but prepared to move to Crewkerne or Ilminster for locally significant planning applications that warrant a move (eg: Crewkerne Key site/Horlicks site in Ilminster”;*
- *“the rotating of venue is not always consistent at present. It does help to have key meetings with a large amount of local interest in the nearest location to enable people to attend”;*

- *“it will be interesting to know what the set up time of 3.5 hours actually costs? Probably more than £130”.*

**Order of agenda** – The Chairman and Vice Chairman assess the anticipated duration of non-planning items and from this set a realistic start time for the planning applications to be determined. This method has been quite accurate throughout the last year. The biggest variable to meeting length is therefore the number of planning applications. Fourteen Councillors (87.50%) wished to retain the current arrangement regarding the order of the agenda with only 2 Councillors (12.50%) wishing to have planning first followed by non-planning.

Comments were:

- “start meeting at 4:00pm”;
- *“again 5:30pm is not good for the public who want to attend. If fresher Councillors is the only pro that can be put forward, then I am sure the stress for Councillors getting there on time and coming straight in to planning will counterbalance that argument.”*

Overall members have indicated that they wish to keep the current arrangements. It is anticipated that the much wider Transformation programme will revisit and reshape Area working over the course of the next 2 years.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no new financial implications arising from this report as members have indicated that they wish to keep the current arrangements. This “cost of democracy” is a conscious choice inherent in the area working arrangements.

## **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**

All the venues used by the Committee require the vast majority of people to travel by car. This is currently the case. The report doesn't seek to change these arrangements

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

All venues are vetted to ensure that they are fully DDA compliant and provide a good quality meeting environment. Ideally they will offer wifi too as this is increasingly expected by the public.

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