

Area West Committee Meeting Arrangements

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Purpose of the Report

To allow members to consider the start time for Area West Committee meetings.

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 representation. Traditionally the Area West Committee is held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month starting at 5.30pm.

Recommendations

That members consider and agree the start time for Area West Committee meetings.

Background

The start times and venues for Area West Committee meetings were last reviewed in June 2015. At that time members decided there was no compelling reason to make any changes, and it was resolved;

- (1) That the start time for Area West Committees remains 5.30 p.m. and
- (2) That Area West Committee meetings are held in the three major towns in Area West unless there is a specific issue or reason to go to a village.

Area Committee Meetings

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 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.

As part of the Transformation Programme, and to assist officers to manage their time more effectively, we now hold Area Committee meetings at venues which are DDA compliant, have a PA, hearing loop system and wifi installed and benefit from the services of a caretaker. The Guildhall in Chard is the main venue for Area West Committee as it has all the above services and can accommodate a large audience when necessary.

Area West Committee meetings normally last between 2 hours 50 minutes and 3 hours 40 minutes, so meetings that begin at 5.30pm can be expected to finish somewhere between 8.20pm and 9.10 pm.

Some meetings have taken much longer than this. To a great extent, this variation is caused by the extra time needed to consider complex or controversial planning applications. This cannot be reduced, although it can be anticipated. Where this is the case, the starting time for consideration of planning applications may be brought forward.

Financial Implications

None

Corporate Priority Implications

None

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

None

Equality and Diversity Implications

Venues must be accessible and enable participation of the public.

Background Papers: Reports to Area West Committee May 2014 and June 2015
