

## **Area South Committee Meeting Times Review**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To allow Area South committee members to consider the suitability of current start time of the Committee meetings following a proposal submitted by Councillor Peter Seib.

### **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. Traditionally the Area South Committee is held at the Brympton Way, Council Offices on the first Wednesday of every month starting at 2 pm, with planning applications being determined first on the agenda.

### **Recommendations**

1. That Members consider the responses to the survey of meeting start times.
2. That Members approve a new start time of 4 pm for a trial period of 6 months to consider the effect upon public participation, Member attendance and officer time.
3. That Members agree that planning matters will continue to be considered at the beginning of the agenda.

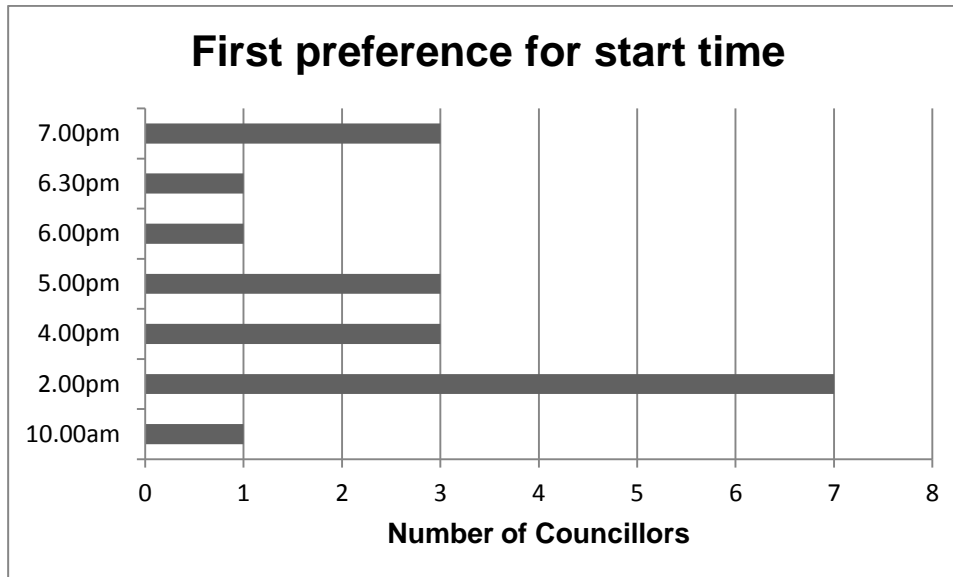
### **Background**

As the Council enters a new quadrennium a Member of the Area South Committee has put forward a proposal that the suitability of the current start time of 2.00 pm for the Area South Committee meetings should be reviewed. It was agreed that members should consider this at their September 2015 meeting.

Traditionally, Area South Committee meetings have started at 2.00pm on the first Wednesday of each month with planning applications being determined first on the agenda.

### **Report**

A survey of all 19 members of the Area South Committee has been undertaken and their responses are as follows:-



18 out of 19 members expressed a preference for planning matters to continue to be dealt with at the beginning of the agenda.

### Changing the Area South Committee commencement time

Members will see from the survey responses, that whilst 7 members wish to retain the existing arrangements, the majority (11) members would prefer to change to a later start time. However, whilst there is a marked consensus to keep the determination of planning applications as the first item of business, there is no consensus on a particular starting time after 2pm.

In consideration of these responses and taking into account all preferences the recommendation has been framed as a basis for debate as the majority of members (10, 3 members for 4 pm and 7 members for 2 pm) have indicated a preferred start time of 4pm or earlier in the afternoon.

If it is not possible to reach a consensus on an alternative start time during the meeting the existing start time of 2 pm will continue.

### Members Views

As part of the survey, Members were asked if they wished to add any individual comments. These included:-

- Some consideration should be given to younger councillors and also councillors with employers who don't support them.
- A later start to meetings will assist councillors who work and the public who may also have daytime jobs.
- Changing the start time could have a cost implication for officers attending the meetings.
- When elected, councillors knew what the meeting times were.

- I don't see the benefit in moving planning although if it were later then members of the public who work would have more chance of attending.
- Considering planning applications after other business ensures the public, applicants and working councillors can attend without an adverse effect on the local economy.
- No matter what start time, some will always be unable to attend.

## 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 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.

Area Committee	Meeting Start Time	Planning Application start time
North	2.00pm	4.00pm – but can be flexible and brought forward to 3.00pm or 3.30pm if there are a number of planning applications
East	9.00am	10.45am – but can be flexible and brought forward to 10.15am if there are a number of planning applications
West	5.30pm (but can change depending upon reports from 5.00pm to 6.00pm)	7.00pm - but can be flexible and brought forward to 6.30pm if there are a number of planning applications
South	2.00pm	2.00pm

## Meeting Times

These are the meeting duration times for Area South Committee from June 2014 to June 2015.

Month	Start (pm)	Finish (pm)	Duration
<b>2014</b>			
June	2.00	4.05	2.05
July	2.00	4.50	2.50
August	Meeting Cancelled		
September	2.00	4.15	2.15
October	2.00	3.50	1.50

November	2.00	5.50	3.50
December	4.00	5.35	1.35
<b>2015</b>			
January	Meeting Cancelled		
February	2.00	4.05	2.05
March	2.00	3.05	1.05
April	2.00	4.35	2.35
May	No meeting due to Elections		
June	2.00	5.00	3.00

- The average meeting time was 2 hours 15 minutes
- The shortest meeting took 1 hour and 5 minutes
- The longest meeting took 3 hours and 50 minutes

### **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**

Councillors survey responses July 2015

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