

Area West Committee – 21st May 2014

10. Area West Committee Meeting Times Review

Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Strategic Director (Place and Performance)
Assistant Director: Helen Rutter/Kim Close Assistant Director Communities
Service Manager: Andrew Gillespie Area Development Manager
Contact Details: andrew.gillespie@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01460) 260426

Purpose of the Report

To allow committee members to reconsider the suitability of current start times and venues for Area West Committee meetings following a proposal submitted by Cllr Andrew Turpin.

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.

Recommendations

- (1) That members consider the proposal that Area West Committee meetings start at 14:30 followed at 16:00 by (consideration of) Planning Applications;
- (2) That members consider the merits of holding Area West meetings in the same venue throughout the year;
- (3) That meeting arrangements for Area West Committee be reviewed at least once every two years.

Background

The February meeting of the Area West Committee began at 5.30pm and ran until 10.15 p.m. Following this relatively late finish, a member (Cllr Turpin) put forward the following proposal to bring forward the starting time of meetings and it was agreed that members should consider this at their May 2014 meeting, at the start of the civic year.

Changing the Area West commencement time.

Proposal - That Area West Committees start at 1430 followed at 1600 by Planning Applications.

At the last Area West meeting members were expected to think lucidly and to address complex issues in a meeting that finished at approximately 2215.

As a Council we promote the use of sustainable transport. Yet, at this time of night using public transport would not be possible.

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.

However, members will be aware that the choice of venue and starting time(s) has always been a matter for each Area Committee to decide. The expectation is that Area

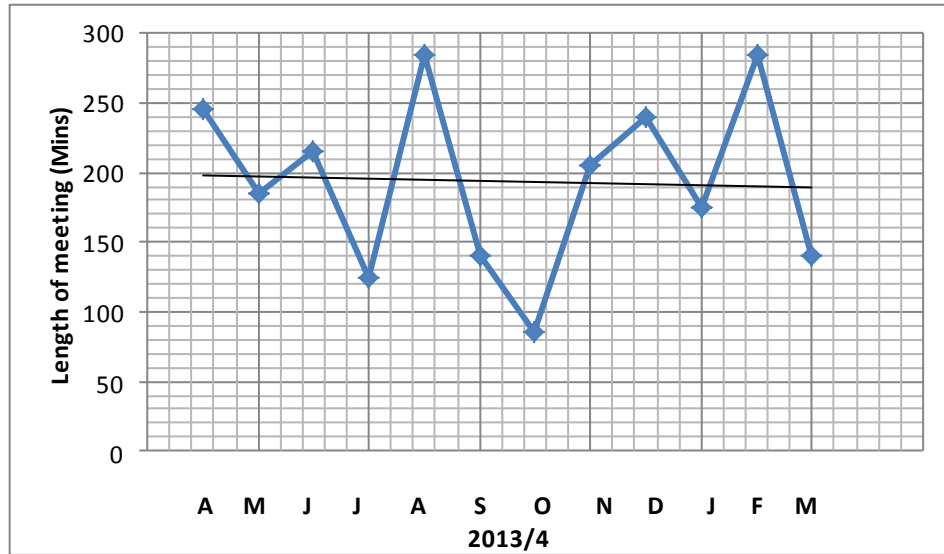
Committee meetings are held at a time and place which members feel is best suited to their Area. The result is that the arrangements for all four Area Committees are not the same, with wide variation in “best” practice.

It is recognised that arrangements will always involve some compromise. In every previous review in Area West, when members have discussed their local arrangements to ensure that they remain suitable, it has been decided not to make any changes. Those reviews have taken place on an ad-hoc basis, but it is now proposed that a review is put into the Area Committee forward plan and scheduled to take place every two years.

Meeting Times and Venues

These are the meeting times and venues for Area West Committee Meetings in 2013/14

Month	Venue	Start (pm)	Finish (pm)
April	Holyrood Academy, Chard	5:30	9:35
May	Holyrood Academy, Chard	5:30	8:35
June	Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne	5:30	9:05
July	Shrubbery Hotel, Ilminster	5:30	7:35
August	Holyrood Academy, Chard	4:45	9:30
September	Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne	5:30	7:50
October	Merriott Village Hall	5:30	6:55
November	Shrubbery Hotel, Ilminster	5:30	8:55
December	Horton Village Hall	5:45	9:45
January	The Guildhall, Chard	5:30	8:25
February	Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne	5:30	10:15
March	Merriott Village Hall	5:30	7:50



Meetings should be neither too short nor too long. If the issues and decisions considered at each meeting are regarded as broadly similar, Area West meetings should take between 2 hours 50 minutes and 3 hours 40 minutes¹. If meetings were to begin at 5.30pm then the planned finish time should usually be between 8.20pm and 9.10 pm.

As the graph illustrates, there was considerable variation in the length of meetings.

In 2013:

- The average meeting time was 3 hours 15 minutes (although no meeting actually took 3 hours 15 minutes)
- The average meeting time fell over the year from 3 hours 20 minutes to 3 hours 10 minutes
- The shortest meeting took 85 minutes
- The longest meeting took 4 hours and 45 minutes

Of the 12 meetings held in 2013/2014, 4 finished early, 4 finished late and 4 took between 2:50 and 3:20 hours.

This variation was caused by the need to spend more time to consider fully complex or controversial planning applications, or by setting “light” agendas in anticipation of planning applications which were then postponed at short notice, or by no planning applications being referred.

Whilst every effort is made by officers to arrange meetings where business can be completed within a reasonable time, the only feasible way to ensure an earlier finish is to agree to an earlier start.

Six different venues were hired to host Area West Committee meetings throughout the year. Again, in previous reviews members have endorsed this practice, so that local residents may attend. As has been observed, the number of local residents attending for non-planning matters has remained very low.

1 – Using Statistical Process Control (SPC) method.

Members may wish to reconsider the alternative of establishing the same regular meeting venue. This would enable a small reduction in cost through a block booking and streamlined set up arrangements. It would also allow the most suitable choice for access to public transport. However, the flexibility to hold meetings on major planning applications as close as possible to the proposed site, as now, can be expected to keep overall journey times to a minimum.

Financial Implications

None.

Corporate Priority Implications

None.

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

None.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None.

Background Papers: *None*
