

Area West Committee Meeting Arrangements

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Purpose of the Report

To allow members to consider both the starting times and venues 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.

Recommendations

- (1) That the normal starting time for Area West Committee meetings remains 5.30 p.m.
- (2) That Area West Committee meetings continue to be held at different venues throughout the year.

Background

The start times and venues for Area West Committee meetings were last reviewed in May 2014. 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 continue to be held at different venues throughout the year;

However, it was recognised that it would be helpful if these arrangements could be confirmed or amended at the beginning of the new council and then once every two years thereafter to ensure that they remained “fit for purpose” and so it was further resolved;

- (3) That meeting arrangements for Area West Committee be reviewed again at the beginning of the new Council year in 2015.

In this report it is recommended that existing arrangements are confirmed.

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.

The choice of venue and starting time 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.

No arrangements will be able to suit everyone perfectly and some compromise is needed.

For many years the Area West Committee has been organised so Area Development issues are considered in the first part of the meeting. Applications for Planning Permission are considered in the second part of the meeting and this does not begin before 7pm unless alternative arrangements have been made.

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 AWC 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, larger venues will be hired and 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

For a whole number of reasons, some people could find the AWC meetings less accessible to them than other people. Officers will consider what additional measures can be put in place to ensure that no-one is excluded.

Background Papers: None
