

CABINET
23rd JUNE 2009

LOCATION OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

Executive Summary

One of the three key goals set out in the Council's First Year Plan is to "Ensure local, open, honest decision making". The proposals in this report aim to support that goal by providing for meetings of the Council's committees, where possible, to be held within the locality affected by the decisions being made at that meeting. The proposals further support this goal by providing for meetings of Cabinet to be held at locations around the county, and the Cabinet Forward Plan being used to identify specific meetings that should be held within a specific locality.

Proposal

That the Cabinet:

- a) Agree that a rotation scheme for meetings of the Cabinet be devised so that meetings are regularly held around the county and that the Cabinet Forward Plan be used to identify specific meetings that should be held within a specific locality.
- b) Commend the proposal that wherever possible and particularly where decisions are to be made that affect a specific locality, those meetings should be held within that locality.

Reason for Proposal

1. There has been some public concern that in the new Council, "everything will happen in Trowbridge".
2. One of the overall goals for the new council is "local, open honest decision making".
3. From a democratic point of view, it is far better for decisions to be made in the location most affected by that decision.

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LOCATION OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

Background

1. There has been some public concern that in the new Council, “everything will happen in Trowbridge”.
2. In terms of the democratic core of the organisation this is far from what is proposed. Indeed one of the overall goals for the new Council is “local, open honest decision making”. Wherever possible decisions should be made within the locality to which the decision relates.
3. The purpose of this report is to outline what the public can expect to happen within their communities and propose to rotate other meetings geographically around the county.

Main Considerations for the Cabinet

4. There is no formal or statutory requirement for the new Council to make decisions in a particular geographical location. Indeed from a democratic point of view it is far better for decisions to be made in the location which is most affected by the decision.
5. One needs, however, to draw a distinction between decision-making which affects specific localities and decision-making where there is no specific geographical dimension to it as it is of a general policy nature.
6. Area Boards, which will be involved in decisions that impact on a specific locality, will meet within the locality of the communities that they represent.
7. Likewise Area Planning Committees will normally meet in the main geographical area that they represent, i.e. the offices in Chippenham, Devizes, Salisbury and Trowbridge.
8. The Strategic Planning Committee will mainly be concerned with overall policy issues and large scale major developments. When it does consider issues that have a specific geographic dimension to them, e.g. an application for mineral extraction or waste disposal, the Committee could meet within the appropriate locality.
9. Licensing is another service which has a distinct geographic dimension to it. The Licensing Committee will concentrate in general on the setting of policy. Individual licensing functions will be delivered through licensing sub-committees. The service will be organised in a similar way to development control so it is logical that the sub-committees will also meet within the main geographical area to which their business relates.
10. The Standards Committee (comprising Councillors and co-opted members) is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct. The

present Committee has expressed a preference for continuing to meet at County Hall. However it expects its sub-committees to hear individual complaints within the area where the complainant lives [usually the relevant local office].

11. There will be other decision-making committees in the new Council that deal with issues of a general nature, such as the Audit Committee, Staffing Policy Committee etc., and Council itself. There is no real reason, from a public perspective, why these should meet at a location other than County Hall. However there is also no reason why these committees could not meet in other locations if their members wish to do so (but there are practical difficulties for the Council itself).
12. Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) demonstrated during the transition how it can effectively meet around the County. New structures for O&S in the new Council have been agreed but one might expect any task groups whose remit includes some geographical element to it, to meet in specific localities to take evidence etc. With the main O&S committees, where there are items of a specific geographical nature every effort will be made to meet within the appropriate locality.
13. There is an argument for meetings of the Cabinet to be rotated around the County. Indeed, this would be one way of demonstrating the Council's commitment to the Government's proposal to place a duty on local authorities to promote democracy. Where practicable, the location of the Cabinet's meetings could take into account items of a local nature on its forward plan.

Environmental Impact of the Proposals

14. Holding meetings within the locality affected by the decisions being made at that meeting would reduce the vehicle mileage of local attendees. This may reduce the environmental impact of the meeting.

Equality and Diversity Impact of the Proposal

15. Holding meetings within the locality affected by the decisions being made at that meeting would decrease the travelling time and cost for local attendees. This would assist groups who have difficulty travelling long distances.

Risk Assessment

16. The risks associated with holding meetings in a variety of locations would be assessed on an individual basis.

Financial Implications

17. There may be some financial implication of holding meetings in properties not owned by the Council, due to the fees charged for their use. However, in many cases the nearest Wiltshire Council hub would be used at no increased cost to the Council.

Legal Implications

18. There is no legal requirement for the new Council to make decisions in a particular geographical location.

Conclusion

19. The Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the proposal.
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Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of Locations of Council Meetings

SUMMARY OF LOCATIONS OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

Council	County Hall
Cabinet	4 local offices (Chippenham, Devizes, Salisbury and Trowbridge) plus other areas where practicable
Area Development Control Committees and Licensing Sub-Committees	4 local offices
Policy Committees (including Strategic Planning, Licensing, Audit, Staffing)	County Hall, or the 3 other local offices
Overview & Scrutiny Committee	County Hall, or the 3 other local offices. Task & Risk Groups where appropriate taking into account their subject
Area Boards	Appropriate locations within the 20 community areas
Standards Committee	County Hall
Standards Sub-Committee	Appropriate locations depending upon complainant's convenience