

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	2 nd September 2014
Report of:	Head of Governance and Democratic Services
Subject/Title:	Notice of Motion – Changes to Meeting Venues
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor J P Findlow, Governance

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The following Notice of Motion, proposed by Councillor Simon McGrory and seconded by Councillor Penny Butterill, was submitted to Council at its meeting on 17 July 2014 and stood referred to Cabinet for consideration:-

“The Council expresses dissatisfaction that the Southern Planning Committee, not for the first time, was displaced from its established meeting room which had been booked a year in advance. Instead it had to use the Library with no sound system and delayed IT. This was to make way for an appeal hearing which could and should have been accommodated elsewhere.

If a Council committee is booked for a specific venue, under no circumstances should it be relocated elsewhere unless the room is made unavailable by an emergency such as a fire”.

- 1.2 This report addresses the matters referred to in the motion.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to consider the above motion and to agree that no further action be taken in response to it.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To consider the matter raised in the motion and to propose any action that Cabinet may feel is appropriate.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 N/A

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 N/A

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 Any changes to Council procedure Rules would need to be subject to a recommendation of the Constitution Committee and a resolution of Council

7.0 Implications for Rural Communities

- 7.1 None.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 None identified.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 None identified.

10.0 Risk Management

- 10.1 Changes to the current Rules by the imposition of a requirement that meeting venues should only be changed where there is an “emergency” would create risk to the way in which Council business is conducted, where there are good reasons for changes in venues.

11.0 Background and Options

- 11.1 The above motion refers specifically to changes to the venue of a Southern Planning Committee meeting, but relates to all Council Committees. Venues for all of the Council's public meetings are posted on Council's website and are also included on a notice, which is displayed on various Council notice boards. Rule 26.1 of the Committee and Sub-Committee Procedural Rules states that “Meetings of Committees and Sub-Committees will be set out in the Calendar of Meetings, approved by the Council under Procedure Rule 1.1. There will be a presumption against alterations to the date, time and venue for meetings”.
- 11.2 With regard to planning committees only, the Protocol on Public speaking rights at Strategic Planning Board and Planning Committees, contained within the Council's Constitution, states that the Southern Planning Committee usually meets at the Municipal Buildings, Crewe and the Northern Planning Committee at Macclesfield Town Hall, but as venues and start times of the meetings are subject to change, members of the public are reminded that it is important to check the details on the relevant agenda, or to contact officers for confirmation. The default venue for meetings of the Strategic Planning Board is Macclesfield Town Hall. However, some meetings are held at the Municipal Buildings, Crewe; the venue for each individual meeting being at the Chairman's discretion, having regard to the number of planning matters which are to be considered at the meeting in question, the proximity of the development sites to the two meeting venues and the scale of the proposed development. Occasionally it is necessary for meetings to be held at a larger venue, when a large public attendance is anticipated. Again, members of the public are advised to check the details on the relevant agenda, as published on the Council's website, or to contact officers for confirmation.

- 11.3 It is clear that changing meeting venues should be avoided, wherever possible. However, there will be some occasions when it will be necessary to relocate venues. For example, a number of meeting rooms are required during the election period and for other important Council events, such as the current Local Plan examination. It is also sometimes necessary to relocate meetings if a large public attendance is anticipated. If a venue is to be changed, Democratic Services Officers will inform Members as soon as possible, giving the reasons for the change.

In the example referred to in the Motion, the reason for the change in the venue of the Southern Planning Committee meeting was that a Planning Inquiry was scheduled to take place over a number of days and the room would not have been available in time for the Committee meeting to take place there. The Council Chamber, at the Municipal Buildings in Crewe is considered to be the most suitable venue for Planning Inquiries in the South of the Borough, in terms of the location and the facilities available. The request to use the Council Chamber (the usual venue for Southern Planning Committee meetings) would have been made when the Planning Department was notified by the Planning Inspectorate of Inquiry dates. Inquiries currently last between 3 to 8 days and the Planning Inspector prefers to use the same venue for the whole Inquiry, as all sides have large amounts of documentation, which needs to be stored securely.

- 11.4 The wording of the motion if accepted would create inflexibility from an operational perspective. It would also create uncertainty, given the proposed qualification that venues should only be changed in an "emergency such as a fire".
- 11.5 It is considered that the existing constitutional provisions, which presume against alterations to the date, time and venue of meetings is sufficient to address the matters referred to in the motion.

12.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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