

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	11 th February 2015
Report of:	Head of Governance and Democratic Services
Subject/Title:	Notice of Motion – Location of Strategic Planning Board Meetings
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Don Stockton, Housing and Jobs Cllr Paul Findlow, Governance

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to respond to the following Motion to Council on 11 December 2014 on Location of Strategic Planning Board (SPB) meetings which was proposed by Cllr D Brickhill and seconded by Cllr A Moran:

“In the light of the chairman’s decision to hold a Strategic Planning Board meeting in Macclesfield when all the items of the agenda (bar one in Ollerton) were in the south of the Borough, it is clear that the previous decision of Council is not being observed by him. Therefore his discretion in this matter is withdrawn. The location of the meeting in Crewe or Macclesfield shall be decided only on the basis of whether the majority of the agenda items are in the south or north of the Borough, as this was clearly the intention of council especially to avoid residents having to travel long distances e.g. Wrenbury to Macclesfield.”

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council takes a Residents First approach to its meeting arrangements and therefore seeks to ensure that meetings of the SPB are accessible and convenient for those residents wishing to attend them. It is recognised that, on occasions, the arrangements put in place for meetings could have been improved, and that greater emphasis should be placed on residents’ needs. Improvements can also be made to the way in which the Council’s administrative processes are handled and further effort is needed to ensure that this takes place.
- 2.2 The current rules relating to the arrangement for agreeing venues for SPB meetings, are as follows:

“That the Capesthorne Room, Macclesfield Town Hall and the Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings, Crewe be reserved in advance for every scheduled meeting of the Strategic Planning Board, with the room that is not required for a particular meeting being released at the appropriate time, the choice of venue to be at the discretion of the Chairman of the Strategic Planning Board in consultation with

the Vice-Chairman of the Board and officers, provided that in exercising such discretion, the Chairman will have regard to the following considerations:

The number of planning matters which are to be considered at the meeting in question and the proximity of the development sites to the two meeting venues;

The scale of the proposed development associated with the applications to be dealt with at the meeting in question; the complexity of issues associated with, or the controversial nature of, the proposed development, and the likely consequential public interest”.

- 2.3 The motion referred to in paragraph 1.1 refers specifically to an SPB meeting held on 17 September 2014. This included items / applications from Wrenbury (2), Crewe, Sandbach, Ollerton, Congleton and Poynton. There was therefore more than one item from the ‘North’ of the Borough. (Items in Congleton are now presented to the Northern Committee.)
- 2.4 The location of the SPB is determined on the basis of a discussion between the Chairman and officers. In reaching his decision upon meeting venues, the Chairman is reliant upon the advice given to him by officers. As a rule, this will be where the majority of the applications are located. This is demonstrated by the fact that meetings since January 2014 have resulted in 11 being held at Crewe and 9 at Macclesfield.
- 2.5 There are, however, times when the nature of the applications may mean that simply having the meeting located on a ‘majority’ basis may be inappropriate. For example, an application of high public interest and public attendance could be pushed to a location further away because the agenda consists of 2 or 3 minor changes to schemes with little, if any, public interest. This is why it is considered that an element of discretion is still needed to enable the most suitable venue to be determined.
- 2.6 Taking into account the need for the implications for residents to be more firmly taken into consideration when decisions about meeting arrangements are made, it is considered that the existing rules, set out in paragraph 2.2, provide all of the flexibility needed in the circumstances. The arrangements could be further enhanced by consideration being given to the development of key performance indicators, which would enable officers to provide information upon the locations of SPB meetings, and the fundamental reasons for those decisions, taking into account the criteria set out in paragraph 2.2.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 That the Chairman’s discretion in determining the venue for a meeting of the Strategic Planning Board be retained in accordance with the arrangements approved by Council on 27 February 2014.

4.0 Reason for Recommendation

4.1 To ensure that the arrangements are appropriate and practicable.

5.0 Wards Affected

5.1 All

6.0 Local Ward Members

6.1 All

7.0 Policy Implications

7.1 There are no such direct implications.

8.0 Implications for Rural Communities

8.1 The locations of SPB meetings have implications for rural communities, taking into account important considerations, such as accessibility to public transport, and the availability of other forms of transport to rural residents.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 None.

10.0 Legal Implications

10.1 None.

11.0 Risk Management

11.1 None.

12.0 Access to Information

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

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