

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer

TO: Civic Affairs Committee

15/7/2014

WARDS: All

CONSTITUTIONAL IMPACT - TRANSFER OF PLANNING ITEMS FROM AREA TO CENTRAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Transport on 8 July is due to make recommendations to Council on the transfer of planning decisions from area committees to the Planning Committee. Council will consider these recommendations at its meeting on 24 July.
- 1.2 A reduction in the known workload of area committees with the removal of the need to comply with deadlines for determining household planning applications, mean that there is scope to reduce the frequency of Area Committees, and a report to explore this has been requested by the ruling group. The frequency is set out in the Constitution under the Area Committee Procedure Rules. Council will need to change the rules to effect the change proposed.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee requests Council to:

- i) agree Area Committee meeting frequency is altered from the current 'every eight weeks' to 'at least four times per year' commencing from October 2014, with each Area Committee continuing, as now, to set its own timetable of meetings for the municipal year; and
- ii) instruct the Head of Legal Services to amend the Constitution to reflect this change.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Part 4EE of the Constitution covers the Area Committee Procedure Rules. These currently require area committees to: “set their own timetable of meetings, but shall, so far as practical, meet every 8 weeks.” If Council agrees to move planning decisions to a single Planning Committee, the frequency of Area Committees can be reviewed as it was geared to the turnaround time for determining household planning applications. Without that planning-driven requirement, there would no longer be the need for Area Committees to meet so frequently.
- 3.2 Officers have reviewed the requirements of both partners and council services for the remainder of the 2014/15 municipal year. The Forward Plan of the known business is appended. This illustrates that there are meetings currently in the schedule which would no longer be essential for Council or partner business. Removing some or all of these meetings would still allow the Council to conduct its core business and provide a forum for community engagement, but would also free up a certain amount of member and officer time and resources over the year.
- 3.3 Each Area Committee will be asked to consider and decide on its schedule at the next round of meetings following 24 July Council ie. starting with the East Area Committee on 31 July. In September, Area Committee chairs will meet with officers to review agenda priorities and further ways to increase public involvement in meetings which will inform a report to each Area Committee from October. The lessons learned from the Council’s “North Area Pilot” in 2011/12, as reported to Strategy & Resources Committee on 9 July 2012, may be helpful in this regard.
- 3.4 Amending the Constitution to require at least four meetings per year, would allow for any Area Committee to meet more often than that if its business requires it to do so.

4. CONSULTATIONS

This report has been sent to all Members for comment. The minute of the Committee will be considered by the Council at its meeting on 24 July.

5. **OPTIONS**

The committee could choose not to make a recommendation to Council or to amend the recommendation.

6. **IMPLICATIONS**

(a) **Financial Implications**

The budget amendment to Council on 24 July includes savings from fewer area committee meetings in 2014/15, based on an assumption that area committees would meet five times per whole year in future. If area committees met more often than this then there would be fewer savings. Any further savings for 2015/16 onwards will be included in the budget setting report in January 2015.

(b) **Staffing Implications** (if not covered in Consultations Section)

(c) **Equalities and Poverty Implications**

(d) **Environmental Implications**

(e) **Procurement Implications**

(f) **Consultation and communication**

(g) **Community Safety Implications**

(b)-(g) If an area committee met less frequently, public engagement with councillors may happen in other ways and would continue to take place at the meetings which remain in the Municipal Calendar. It is possible that with fewer meetings, some public engagement would be missed but that cannot be quantified.

There will be communication (f) about the change to frequency of meetings in Cambridge Matters and through other council communication channels, through committee manager distribution lists and at the Area Committees between July and October.

For staff (b), there would be fewer meetings to plan, prepare for, manage and attend. Community Safety (g) would continue to be considered at area committees on a regular basis.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: The following are the background papers that were used in the preparation of this report:

Report on Area Working: Review of Participation Pilot to Cambridge City Council Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, 9th July 2012.

The author and contact officer for queries on the report is Gary Clift on 01223 457011 gary.clift@cambridge.gov.uk

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Forward Plan of known Area Committee business

East

23/10/14

4/12/14

8/1/15 policing and safer neighbourhoods

19/2/15

9/4/15 annual grants

North

30/10/14

18/12/14 policing and safer neighbourhoods

12/2/15

9/4/15 annual grants, policing and safer neighbourhoods

South

13/10/14 policing and safer neighbourhoods

8/12/14

2/2/15 policing and safer neighbourhoods

30/3/15 annual grants

West/Central

29/10/14

7/1/15 policing and safer neighbourhoods

5/3/15

23/4/15 annual grants, policing and safer neighbourhoods