

REPORT TO ALL MEMBER WORKING GROUP PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS



Report Reference C-20-07
Meeting Date 5th July 2021
Agenda Item 10
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Planning and Licensing Committee meets every three weeks and is held at 6pm on a Monday. It regularly precedes another meeting and when it does the start time of the later meeting is set for 7:30pm to give the Planning Committee 1.5hrs for its meeting.

The June Planning Working Group meeting was a marathon meeting lasting almost three hours which significantly delayed the start of the Finance Committee meeting which followed it. The Town Clerk was asked by members to investigate options for preventing such an overrun in future.

During the previous ten months, the June meeting was the only meeting to go significantly (more than 5 minutes) exceed 1.5 hours. Whilst there have been delayed starts to later meetings due to the length of the Planning Committee meetings, many of these were before the committee was given 1.5hrs as standard. Around 80% of Planning Committee meetings are within 1.5 hours.

The Town Clerk canvassed members for their thoughts on four options:

1. Do nothing – note that it is rare for Planning to go over the 1.5hrs allotted to it and accept that it may happen on occasion
2. Adjournment - add a standing order to require that where a meeting is preventing another from starting by more than (e.g.) 5 minutes it shall be adjourned to another time to allow the later meeting to start
3. Move Day – hold Planning Committee meetings on (for example) a Tuesday so that ordinarily there are no back to back committee meetings
4. Separate Trees – establish a sub-committee (comprising 4 members) to determine responses to tree work applications to shorten slightly planning meetings.

It is notable that the meeting included an additional week-worth of applications (due to the committee meeting having been delayed a week by the bank holiday) and that the meeting would have been unlikely to have delayed the following meeting so significantly had the meeting been held physically with the members for the latter meeting waiting in the room.

There was no clear consensus on which approach to take with some members advocating moving Planning Committee meetings to their own night and others advocating keeping them on Mondays.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

Based on feedback from members the following solution is proposed:

- a) Planning and Licensing Committee meetings remain on Monday evenings between 6pm and 7:30pm.
- b) A convention is agreed that where a meeting is to overrun by more than five minutes, the Chairman shall usually adjourn the meeting to enable the other meeting to start within a reasonable time.
- c) The Planning and Licensing Committee shall agree a series of standard responses to applications (particularly for tree work applications which are less diverse than planning applications) which can be referred to during meetings.

Retaining meetings on a single night has the benefit of reducing the number of evening commitments for members and members of the public. A convention of adjournment for long meetings would ensure that other scheduled meetings were not delayed in the event of a further extraordinarily long meeting and a series of standard responses would provide members with a reference of properly worded comments and objections to applications to enable swift debate of the simplest applications.

3.0 DIRECTION REQUIRED

Members are asked to consider the recommended action to prevent the disruption of the prompt commencement of meetings.