

Future arrangements for Area East Committee

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Purpose of the Report

To update members on progress on the arrangements for future Area East Committee meetings.

Public Interest

The Area Committee meetings provide an opportunity to ensure that decisions about local resources and planning applications are taken locally in an open and transparent way and give access to the public to attend in person. They also provide an opportunity for the public to engage with their local councillor representatives and raise matters directly in an open and public environment.

Recommendation

That Members agree the future arrangements for the Area Committee meetings.

Background

Churchfields currently provides an operational base for SSDC staff, front of house support for customers and a meeting space for the area committee and external groups. It also accommodates the Neighbourhood Policing Team and front desk.

The building has been under occupied for a number of years despite numerous attempts to market the available space to other organisations and for other purposes.

SSDC no longer requires the building as an operational asset due to Transformation and progress towards new ways of working.

Members will recall that the disposal of excess operational property was proposed and agreed in the Commercial Strategy 2017-21. Also, that District Executive would take the decision on our operational offices like Churchfields and Brympton Way. The decision to dispose of Churchfields was approved by District Executive in March 2018.

A commitment was made that disposal would only happen once tenants were given reasonable notice and found alternative accommodation. For Churchfields this was, and still is, expected to happen by the end of 2019. The nursery moved out on 2nd September and the Police will relocate by the end of the year.

Area Presence

SSDC will continue to require a presence in the area. This breaks down into three distinct areas, customer access, desk space for SSDC staff and the area Committee meetings. Desk space with access to printing, kitchen and toilet facilities is available at the Balsam Centre for use by any SSDC officer.

Customer Access

Front desk presence has been replaced by a new Customer Access Point (CAP). The CAP provides touchscreen access to council services and can be used to complete forms, report issues, upload evidence and contact the council via a dedicated phone line. Direct help or support is available to vulnerable customers by the Customer Focussed team on an appointment basis. In some circumstances home visits can be carried out by the Locality Team, at the request of a case officer.

The table below details the options considered for the CAP.

Options

Options considered	Comments
Wincanton Town Hall	Space could accommodate a CAP. Opening times are currently limited. Access issues in terms of location in relation to car parking. Not accessible for wheelchair users. Complimentary services (WTC & LIC) on site. Staff available with potential to support customers.
Wincanton Library	SSDC services already available via public access PC's. Space is and opening times are currently limited. Complimentary services on site. Reasonable access to building and car parking. Staff available with potential to provide support to customers.
Balsam Centre	CAP could be accommodated in the Café area. Opening times 9am to 6.30pm, 5 days p/w. Limited availability Good accessibility and access to parking. Complimentary services (SCC, CASS, Health Visitors SSCAT etc) delivered could be a community hub. Staff and volunteers available to support customers.

A decision on the location of the CAP would not preclude further discussions should other options become available through the work of the Wincanton Regeneration board. The need to continue to provide access to our services from the end of this year is a priority and it is considered that the Balsam Centre provides the best option currently.

Area Committee – Future arrangements

Requirements for committee arrangements are as set out below.

1. Space needs to be available at a regular time on a monthly basis. We are working on the basis that the area committee will continue to meet monthly on the second Wednesday of the month.
2. Completely accessible – The venue will need to be physically accessible to all and include a compatible hearing loop.
3. Set up for use. It is not practical for case officers (democratic services) to set the room up and pack down after the meeting. The venue will need to be equipped with compatible audio visual equipment and have full caretaking facilities.
4. Capacity to accommodate 14 councillors and up to 40 members of the public.
5. Adequate parking for Councillors and members of the public

Locations considered	Comments
The Balsam Centre	Would be sensible if CAP and touchdown space is likely to be here. Good access. Space called 'The Shed' is the largest room but could not accommodate the number attendees that we sometimes have for a large planning

	application. Reception/caretaking staff available. Not available for a regular booking at the current time. Car parking available. Very limited storage space.
Wincanton Racecourse	Car Park available. Appropriate sized room available. Some work required regarding loop system etc. Out of the town centre. Main/other uses are not considered to be complimentary and could conflict.
Wincanton Memorial Hall	Can accommodate all of the requirements set out above.

There are a number of good quality community facilities in other market towns and villages. Consideration was given to halls in Ansford, Galhampton, Charlton Musgrove and Cucklington and West Camel. However, Wincanton is a good accessible location due to the A303. Space for hotdesking is available at the Balsam Centre which will be convenient for officers attending the Area Committee meetings.

The only venue able to meet all the requirements is Wincanton Memorial Hall. It is likely that the first meeting in the new venue will be March 2020.

Financial Implications

The cost of hiring the Memorial Hall as a regular monthly venue will be £26 per hour and will therefore be in the region of £104 to £130 per month depending upon the length of each meeting. This will be met from the Democratic Services central budget.

Council Priority Implications

The work set out in this report contributes towards meeting the aims under the theme of ensuring a modern, efficient and effective council that delivers for its communities.

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

Providing local access to a range of activities and services, reducing the need to travel which therefore reduces carbon emissions.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Any proposed changes will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

Background Papers

Commercial Strategy – 2017 to 2021
Area+ Implementation Plan
District Executive – March 2018