



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 2 FEBRUARY 2024
Subject	FREQUENCY OF SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS
Wards Affected	None
Accountable Member	Councillor Julian Cooper – Chair, Development Control Committee. Email: julian.copper@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Andrew Brown – Business Manager, Democratic Services. Email: andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk
Report Author	Andrew Brown – Business Manager, Democratic Services. Email: andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk
Purpose	To allow the Development Control Committee to consider the frequency of Sub-Committee meetings.
Annexes	Nil.
Recommendation	That Development Control Committee Resolves to: I. Agree that the frequency of sub-committee meetings in 2024/25 will be either: a) 4-weekly; or b) monthly.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Business Manager for Development Management; Director of Governance.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report invites the committee to consider the frequency of sub-committee meetings. The options are to hold sub-committee meetings 4-weekly (as at present), or monthly.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Development Control Committee has two sub-committees:

- The Uplands Sub-Committee; and
- The Lowlands Sub-Committee.

2.2 The Sub-Committees have responsibility for determining planning applications within their defined ward areas, other than those of strategic significance that affect the district as a whole or are delegated to officers.

2.3 The Development Control Committee last considered the frequency of sub-committee meetings on 7 November 2022. The Committee decided (on the Chair's casting vote) to maintain the existing pattern of 4-weekly meetings.

2.4 The programme of meetings for 2024/25 will be considered by Council on 31 January 2024 and currently shows a 4-weekly pattern of sub-committee meetings. There is sufficient flexibility to adjust the programme should the Development Control Committee decide to change the frequency of sub-committee meetings from 4-weekly to monthly.

3. FREQUENCY OF SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS

3.1 Table 1 below sets out the average length and number of applications each sub-committee has dealt with in the period since the Development Control Committee last considered the frequency of sub-committee meetings, in November 2022, up to the end of 2023.

Table 1: Sub-committee business and duration

Sub-Committee	# meetings	Average meeting length (hh:mm)	Shortest meeting length (hh:mm)	Longest meeting length (hh:mm)	Average number of applications
Lowlands	15	01:50	00:26	03:06	4.07
Uplands	15	01:48	01:04	02:37	3.53

3.2 The table shows that the two sub-committees deal with a similar number of applications and have a very similar average meeting length, which is under 2 hours. Within that, the length of Lowlands meetings has been more variable, with 3 meetings lasting less than one hour and 4 meetings lasting longer than the longest Uplands meeting.

3.3 The decision to move away from a monthly to a 4 weekly cycle was based on the fact that planning decisions have to be made within 8 weeks and by introducing 4 periods in the year

when there had to be at least a 5-week cycle (12 x 4 is 48 as opposed to 52) meant that some applications were impossible to determine within the relevant timeframe

- 3.4 A new factor has emerged in that since November 2022 the Council has implemented the live streaming of committee and sub-committee meetings and consequently the resource impact of holding each meeting has increased. The additional time for setting up, testing and packing away the microphones and webcasting equipment and managing the live stream during a meeting is estimated to be half a day of officer time per meeting.
- 3.5 Table I cannot be used to predict future business but based on the figures above there would be scope for the Committee to slightly reduce the number of meetings held, from 4-weekly to monthly, while maintaining an average meeting length of around 2 hours.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5. Do nothing and retain a 13-meeting cycle as at present.
- 5.1 An alternative option would be to replace the two area sub-committees with a single sub-committee which meets either 4-weekly or monthly. This is not recommended as the volume of business and the geographical make up of the district are considered to warrant having two area sub-committees.
- 5.2 Planning applications need to be determined within set timescales and reducing the frequency of sub-committee meetings to six-weekly or bi-monthly would significantly impact the Council's ability to determine planning applications in a timely fashion, so this is not recommended as an option.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Members are able to claim travel to expenses for attending meetings. Moving to monthly meetings would reduce the number of sub-committee meetings held annually by two, which would be expected to translate to a marginal decrease in allowance claims. There are no other financial implications.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 There are no risks associated with the two options before the Committee.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 9.1 There are no impacts on equalities.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Moving to monthly meetings would reduce the number of meetings held annually by two, which would have a marginal reduction in the emissions associated with travel to and from meetings.

II. BACKGROUND PAPERS

II.1 None.

(END)