



GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MEETING : Thursday, 7th November 2024

PRESENT : Cllrs. Hilton (Chair), S. Chambers (Vice-Chair), A. Chambers, Chambers-Dubus, Lewis, Norledge and Wilson

Others in Attendance

Monitoring Officer

Managing Director

Policy and Governance Manager

Democratic and Electoral Services Team Leader

APOLOGIES : None.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

8.1 There were no declarations of interest.

9. MINUTES

9.1 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th July 2024 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

10. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

10.1 There were no public questions.

11. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

11.1 There were no petitions or deputations.

12. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

12.1 The Chair, Councillor Hilton, introduced the report and asked the Policy and Governance Manager to provide an overview of the each of the proposed changes for the General Purposes Committee to discuss in turn.

12.2 The Policy and Governance Manager referred to recommendation 2.1(1) concerning the Duration of Meetings. She noted that Members had experienced long Council meetings over recent months, and explained that the council currently had a Guillotine provision which allowed Members to

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determine whether the meeting should close after the 3-hour mark. Members were advised that under the current rules, should they vote to continue the meeting, there was no further opportunity to close the meeting at a later point. The Policy and Governance Manager stated that the new proposal would include a provision that should Members vote to continue the meeting beyond the 3-hour mark, there would be a maximum continuation of one hour. It was noted that this would provide a definite end to the meeting which would assist attendees who may have caring responsibilities.

- 12.3 In response to a query from the Chair regarding adjournments to meetings, the Policy and Governance Manager confirmed that adjournments were not included in meeting time and time was added on for any break in proceedings. It was agreed that this be highlighted in the report.
- 12.4 Councillor Lewis expressed his support for the proposal, stating that he felt that it was sensible and would assist with focusing Council meetings.
- 12.5 Councillor S. Chambers also noted her support for the proposal. She commented that effective decision making was significantly impaired by tiredness and impressed that in supporting the proposal, it should be noted that the purpose was to ensure the best use of decision-making time. She wondered whether the Committee ought to consider changing the order of agenda items and move the question items to the end of the agenda, to allow decision making business to take place earlier in the meeting.
- 12.6 Councillor Chambers-Dubus commented that the proposal was a good idea and noted that she was aware of Members within her group with caring responsibilities who would benefit from a definite finish time.
- 12.7 A discussion ensued around the possibility of the General Purposes Committee making a recommendation to amend the order of Council meeting agenda items to move question items to the end of the meeting. This suggestion was not carried forward.
- 12.8 In respect of recommendation 2.1(2), the Policy and Governance Manager advised that this proposal sought to respond to a request from Members from all political groups to return to oral questions without notice at full Council meetings. She explained that the proposal sought to reinstate the 30-minute time slot for Members to ask spontaneous oral questions to the Cabinet and to retain the current approach of giving priority to Group Leaders to ask two questions and supplementary questions each, followed by questions from Members. Members were informed that the report also proposed to reinstate oral questions without notice to Chairs of Meetings within a 15-minute timeslot. The Policy and Governance Manager advised that no changes were proposed to the notice requirements for questions to Cabinet Members at Cabinet meetings.
- 12.9 Reflecting on the proposals, Councillor A. Chambers suggested that consideration be given to combining the timescale for questions to Cabinet Members and questions to Committee Chairs. The Managing Director reminded Members that they were welcome to ask questions at any time and

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did not need to wait until Council meetings. The Chair further noted that in his view, it was important for Members to have the opportunity firstly to put their questions to Cabinet Members, followed by questions to Committee Chairs.

- 12.10 In response to further comments from Councillor A. Chambers, the Managing Director explained that the intention of the report was not to limit questions to one per Member, but to ensure that as many Members as possible had an opportunity to ask a question initially, and that any remaining time was reserved for Members to ask subsequent questions.
- 12.11 Councillor Lewis noted that his preference would be for the time slot for questions to the Leader and Cabinet to remain at 45 minutes.
- 12.12 The Chair expressed his view that it was necessary to reserve the 15-minute timeslot for Chairs of Committees.
- 12.13 Councillor S. Chambers stated that her preference would be for the time slot for questions to the Leader and Cabinet to remain at 45 minutes. She commented that Members needed to ensure that they kept to time when asking questions, and that she would also like Members to have the opportunity to submit written questions if this was their preference.
- 12.14 In response, the Chair observed that no changes were planned to the notice requirements for questions to Cabinet Members at Cabinet Meetings. It was noted that the option for Members to put written questions would be retained at Cabinet meetings, which also took place on a more regular basis.
- 12.15 Councillor Wilson noted that retaining the 45-minute questions slot would have an impact on the length of time Members had to debate notices of motion. He suggested that the General Purposes Committee agree to recommend that Council implement the new 30-minute proposal and monitor the impact.
- 12.16 In response to further comments from Councillor Lewis, the Chair noted that there was a need to find a balance between the various items of business at Council meetings.
- 12.17 Councillor Chambers-Dubus suggested that questions to Chairs of Committees take place before questions to the Leader and Cabinet Members, and that any time remaining from the Chairs of Committees timeslot be added to the Cabinet Member questions timeslot. The Chair reiterated that Cabinet Member questions would be the priority for Members and confirmed that was content with the suggestion to revert to the 45-minute timeslot.
- 12.18 Councillor A. Chambers reiterated his preference to revert to the 45-minute timeslot for questions to the Leader and Cabinet Member.
- 12.19 In response to a query from Councillor S. Chambers, the Chair noted that it was an individual decision for Members as to whether they wished to contact

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the Cabinet Member in advance to provide notice of their question, noting that this might be helpful if the question was complex or particularly detailed.

- 12.20 The Policy and Governance Manager provided an overview of recommendation 2.1(3) concerning Motions on Notice and invited Members to consider the options outlined at 3.8 in the report. She further outlined the options available to Members to determine the order of motions as at 3.9 of the report.
- 12.21 Councillor A. Chambers expressed that his preference would be to recommend the first option to limit the time allocated to debating Motions on Notice to a 2-hour period.
- 12.22 Councillor Wilson confirmed that his preference would also be to opt for the 2-hour time allocation. He further highlighted that as this was already the approach undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council, some Members would already be familiar with the process.
- 12.23 Councillor Chambers-Dubus echoed her support for the first option, noting that it was the fairest option and most likely to avoid confusion. In commenting on the proposed mechanisms to determine the order of motions, she further expressed her support for the second option for the Managing Director, in consultation with the Mayor, to determine the order of debate.
- 12.24 The Chair suggested that Group Leaders also be consulted when determining the order of motions. He commented that it was important to maintain fairness in allowing each political group to put forward their motions, and stated that rotating the order of motions through the political groups would be the fairest way forward.
- 12.25 Councillor Lewis suggested in order to promote fairness, that the order of motions rotate through the political groups and that Group Leaders decide the priority order for motions from their group. It was further suggested that the order of which motions were considered first also be rotated through the groups.
- 12.26 In response to a question from Councillor Norledge regarding Council Motions which are not reached in the proposed time-limit, the Chair confirmed that Members would need to resubmit those motions.
- 12.27 In response to a query from Councillor S. Chambers regarding the time limits for speakers during motions, the Policy and Governance Manager confirmed that movers, seconders of motions and amendments could speak for up to 5 minutes, and all other speakers in the debate had a 3-minute time limit.
- 12.28 Councillor Lewis suggested that Group Leaders discuss any similar notices of motion to make the best use of time. The Policy and Governance Manager confirmed that there was already a process whereby Members were identified if they were submitting similar notices of motion, and that they were

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welcome to discuss the possibility of submitting joint motions with the relevant Group Leader.

- 12.29 Councillor Wilson suggested that consideration be given to increasing the time-limit for Cabinet Members who were responding to motions.
- 12.30 The Chair provided an overview of recommendation 2.2(4) concerning Rules of Debate. He explained that it proposed to extend the requirement for advance notice of amendments to all Council meeting business, and that the deadline for submission of such amendments be moved to noon one working day before the meeting. Members were further advised that the proposal was for acceptable amendments to be published by 5pm on the same day to ensure that Members had sufficient time to consider and determine their stance.
- 12.31 The Managing Director added that this proposal would bring the deadline in line with the timescale for submitting amendments to notices of motion.
- 12.32 Councillor Wilson expressed his support for this proposal, noting that this would improve the quality of amendments to motions.
- 12.33 In response to a query from Councillor S. Chambers regarding provision for Members changing their mind during debate, the Managing Director reminded Members that the Mayor had a degree of latitude to manage the meeting as they saw fit. He noted that the purpose of the proposal was to avoid future occurrences of live-drafting of amendments whilst Council meetings were taking place and having to adjourn the meeting to allow Members to consider last-minute amendments.
- 12.34 In response to a query from Councillor A. Chambers as to whether any further changes could be made to the constitution, the Chair reiterated his advice for Members to write to him in his capacity as Chair of the General Purposes Committee with further details.
- 12.35 Subject to an amendment to the proposed changes to Council Procedure Rule 12 to extend the proposed time slot for Leader and Cabinet questions to 45 minutes, and an amendment to the proposed changes to Council Procedure Rule 13 to rotate the order of motions through the political Groups with Group Leaders deciding the priority order for their respective motions, Members indicated their support for the recommendations in the report.
- 12.36 General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND** to Council that:
- (1) The proposed changes to Council Procedure Rule 6 (Duration of Meetings) be approved.
 - (2) The proposed changes to Council Procedure Rule 12 (Questions by Members) and any consequential changes to other Council Procedure Rules or parts of the Constitution be approved.

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- (3) The proposed changes to Council Procedure Rule 13 (Motions on Notice) and any consequential changes to other Council Procedure Rules or parts of the Constitution be approved.
- (4) The proposed changes to Council Procedure Rule 15 (Rules of Debate) and any consequential changes to other Council Procedure Rules or parts of the Constitution be approved.
- (5) If agreed, the amendments shall take effect at the close of the Council meeting at which they are agreed.

13. INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

- 13.1 The Policy and Governance Manager introduced the report which followed the latest review of the Gloucestershire County Council County Divisions by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). She referred Members to Appendix 2 of the report which set out which polling districts would be in each County Division under the new changes once the order was approved, noting that the council did not have any control over those particular proposals.
- 13.2 Members were advised that as a result of the new County division boundaries, some polling districts would be moved into the same County division as the rest of the polling districts in that City Council Ward. The Policy and Governance Manager explained that the report proposed to merge polling districts in two respective locations where voters in those polling districts already voted in that location. The proposals were to merge polling district B4 and B2, and polling district P2 with P1. The Policy and Governance Manager emphasised that there would be no impact on voters or voting arrangements as a result of these changes.
- 13.3 The Policy and Governance Manager explained that one polling district, E1, needed to be split as a result of the new Division boundaries. She confirmed that the proposal was to add an additional polling station at the current E1 polling place to accommodate the new E4 polling district. She reassured Members again that there would be no impact on voters, and that this was purely an administrative change to facilitate the efficient running of elections.
- 13.4 Councillor S. Chambers confirmed that she was content with the proposals and noted that a wider consultation by the LGBCE on the proposals had taken place.
- 13.5 The Chair observed that through the new County Division changes, less City Council Wards would be divided.
- 13.6 Councillor A. Chambers thanked the Policy and Governance Manager for her work in preparing the report and for facilitating the efficient running of elections. The Chair echoed the sentiments.

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- 13.7 The Policy and Governance Manager advised that due to a small error in the original order to pass the County Division Changes into law, the order needed to be re-laid. In the event that this resulted in the delaying of the publication of the electoral register following the annual canvass, Members were advised that the changes were included at Appendix 2.
- 13.8 **RESOLVED** that the General Purposes Committee **RECOMMEND** to Council that the proposals for the Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places Review be approved.

Time of commencement: 6.00 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 7.03 pm hours

Chair