

Schedule of Proposed Changes to Council Procedure Rules

Questions by the public (Rule 10)

1. Members of the public would be required to give Democratic Services three clear working days' notice of any question that they wish to ask at any Council or committee meeting that has public question time slot. All questions received would be circulated to the appropriate Councillor so that a full answer could be prepared.
2. A member of the public unable to attend a meeting in person could choose to have their question asked on their behalf by the Mayor or an officer.
3. All questions and answers would be delivered verbally at the meeting and a full response must be provided; the current options to provide a written response or respond at the next meeting would be removed.

Questions by Members (Rule 12)

1. The provision to ask questions without prior notice would be replaced with a requirement to give Democratic Services five clear working days' notice of any question that they wish to ask at Council or Cabinet meetings. This would apply to both Leader and Cabinet Members' Question Time and Questions to Chairs of Meetings and all questions received would be circulated to the appropriate Councillor so that a full answer could be prepared.
2. In line with current practice, the two Leaders of the Opposition Groups would ask two questions each at the beginning of the slot, irrespective of the order in which questions were received. Thereafter questions would be dealt with in the order they were received, including any further questions from Group Leaders.
3. An exception to the five day notice period would be made for urgent questions, for example if a matter had arisen after the notice period had passed and was of citywide importance. 30 minutes notice would be required for such questions and the Member to whom the question is addressed must agree that it can be asked.
4. Provision would be made for questions relating to exempt or confidential matters to be asked with a requirement for appropriate consideration to be given to excluding the press and public from the meeting while the question is asked and answered.
5. Questions would be asked and answered verbally and would therefore not be published except in the minutes of the meeting. Members would continue to be able to ask one related supplementary question without prior notice. The current option to provide a written response would be removed; a written response may be reasonable in the case of the supplementary question; however, Members are expected to answer as fully as they can during the meeting.
6. Any submitted questions that remain unanswered when the allocated time has passed will be answered in writing, with the response circulated to the Member who submitted the question and published with the minutes of the meeting. This does not prevent the Mayor from using their discretion to extend the allocated time if there are only one or two questions remaining.
7. The existing Written Questions to Cabinet Members slot at Council meetings would be removed as the provisions would be too similar to the proposals for verbal questions and would mean that there were two slots for questions requiring notice.

Consequential Amendments

1. Ordinary Meetings Order of Business – all references to Written Questions to Cabinet Members would be deleted to reflect the removal of this facility.
2. Application to Committees and Sub-Committees – additional sentence would be inserted to apply all parts of Rule 12, except 12.04, to meetings of the Cabinet and specify that the time allocated for questions by members at those meetings would be 15 minutes.

Alternative Options

There are a number of alternative options that Members may wish to consider in respect of the detailed arrangements for the proposed changes to questions, such as:

- Increasing the allocated time slot for verbal questions by Members to compensate for the loss of the written questions slot; 40 or 45 minutes may be suitable.
- Publishing the submitted questions in advance as an addendum to the agenda for the public to view.
- Publishing the answers to the submitted questions on the day of the meeting for Members and the public to view.
- Taking submitted questions and answers as read, with only the supplementary question and answer dealt with verbally. This would potentially allow for more questions to be dealt with in the allocated time.