



GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MEETING : Wednesday, 7th September 2022

PRESENT : Cllrs. Williams (Chair), Taylor (Vice-Chair), Hilton, Kubaszczyk, Wilson and Ackroyd

Others in Attendance

Managing Director

Policy and Governance Manager

Democratic Services and Elections Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Evans, Pullen and Hudson

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

The Committee noted the appointments made by Annual Council of Councillor Williams as Chair and Councillor Taylor as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
07.09.22

6. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Paid Service concerning the proposed changes to the Council Procedure Rules (Rule 10 and Rule 12) within the Council's Constitution in respect of questions by the public and Member at meetings.

The Managing Director presented the report and advised that at its meeting on 18 November 2021, Council had approved a number of amendments to the Council Procedure Rules and it had been agreed the General Purposes Committee review the operation of those changes after three ordinary meetings of Council. He noted that since the changes had taken place there had been no impact on the number of questions asked at Council and Cabinet meetings by members of the public, however, there had been a significant increase in the number of questions asked by Members, resulting in a significant increase in officer time spent on researching and preparing responses. The Managing Director advised that in response to this, it was proposed that a limit of five questions per Member per meeting for both Council and Cabinet meetings be introduced. He also noted the proposed changes to the restrictions on the content of both public and Member questions.

Councillor Wilson stated that he largely supported the proposed criteria for rejecting questions, in particular questions those relating to officers, but had reservations about preventing Members from asking similar questions within in a six month period. He also sought assurance that Members would be able to continue asking questions about matters where the Council had a role as an influencer rather than a decision-maker. He commented on the proposal to limit five questions per Member and suggested that it would be better to limit the number of supplementary questions that Members could ask. He did not support the proposal to cease minuting Member questions as this formed part of proceedings and was a useful reference point.

Councillor Hilton commented that the proposal limit of five questions per Member could result in an increase in supplementary questions being asked, as Members would use all their available questions; he preferred the suggestion to limit the number of supplementary questions available to each Member. He did not support the proposal for Member questions to be edited by the Managing Director in consultation with the Mayor and stated that there should not be any restrictions on Members asking questions about potentially confidential matters, as it was a matter for the Cabinet Member to determine how to respond to any such question. He also did not support the proposal to reject questions repeated within a 6 month period as it was up to each Member how they chose to utilise their questions. He noted the proposal to re-order questions to ensure that all Members have an opportunity to ask supplementary question and asked that the schedule of questions be circulated as soon as it had been determined.

The Vice Chair commented that Members should take a sensible approach when asking questions and was satisfied for the Managing Director, in consultation with the Mayor, to decide on the order of supplementary questions to ensure a fair and balanced process. He noted the officer time spent on preparing responses to questions, but stated that it may be preferable to limit the number of supplementary

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
07.09.22

questions rather than the number of questions submitted. He also supported the proposal to continue minuting question responses.

The Managing Director responded on the points raised:

- The proposals would be amended to make it clear that the public and Members could ask Cabinet Members about matters where the council had an influencing, rather than decision-making role.
- The proposals to edit Member questions would be removed.
- The proposal to reject repeated questions within a 6 month period could be removed if the limit on the number of questions was retained.
- Limiting the number of supplementary questions instead of the number of questions that could be submitted would not reduce the burden on officers, as preparing responses to the submitted questions is where the time was spent. Therefore, he strongly recommended retaining the proposed limit of five questions per Member per meeting.
- Practice varied across local authorities, however, the proposal to cease minuting Member questions would be removed.

The Chair stated that the case for introducing a limit on the number of questions each Member could submit was strong and that the proposal should go forward to Council for consideration.

Councillor Hilton commented that he was keen to ensure that Members ability to bring forward changes to the Constitution were not constrained by officers and noted that his request for a discussion item to be added to the meeting agenda had been refused.

The Managing Director advised Councillor Hilton that a discussion could not take place without a formal report being presented to the Committee to allow Members adequate time to consider the proposals prior to the meeting. He confirmed that officers would work with any Member wishing to bring forward proposals for consideration.

Councillors Kubaszczyk and Ackroyd stated that they supported the proposals, with the amendments proposed, and that they should go forward to Council for consideration.

In relation to a question from Councillor Hilton, the Policy and Governance Manager advised that it was likely that Member questions would be alternated to ensure fairness, but that questions from the same Councillor relating to the same subject would be kept together. She added that the schedule of Council questions, without the responses, could be circulated to Members once the order had been determined.

General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND** the changes to Council for approval, subject to the following:

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
07.09.22

- 1) That the changes proposed to Procedural Rules 10(2)(i) and 12.01(i) are amended to permit questions relating to matters that the council may be able to influence even if it is not directly responsible.
- 2) That the proposed restriction on Members asking a question that is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council or Cabinet in the past 6 months be removed from the proposed amendments to Procedural Rule 12.01.
- 3) That the proposal for the Managing Director, in consultation with the Mayor, to be able to edit Member questions to bring them into proper form and brevity be removed from the proposed amendments to Procedural Rule 12.01.
- 4) That the schedule of Member questions (without the responses) be circulated to all Members once the order has been agreed by the Managing Director, in consultation with the Mayor.
- 5) That the proposal not to minute questions and responses be removed.

Time of commencement: 6.00 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 6.45 pm hours

Chair