



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

**COUNCIL**  
**9 SEPTEMBER 2009**

**DOCUMENT 12**

Report of the Corporate Director of Corporate  
and Adult Services as Monitoring Officer

## **Public Questions at Full Council Meetings**

### **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 We are now experiencing longer Full Council meetings. Council was reconvened four times in the last municipal year – a total of 10 meetings instead of the scheduled six.
- 1.2 I have looked at ways to tackle this without impacting in any way on the democratic processes. One area where changes could be made relates to how questions are handled.
- 1.3 Some councils arrange for answers to public and member questions to be made available in writing shortly before the meeting commences. This removes the need for the prepared initial question and response to be read out at the meeting. The supplementary question and response continue to be delivered orally at the meeting.
- 1.4 Members' Services Working Party has considered this arrangement and has recommended that Council takes this step in relation to public questions. It would not impact on the democratic purpose of the questions but would reduce the overall time consumed in reading out questions and answers which are often prepared in advance. It would also provide members of the public with more time to absorb the response and pose a proper supplementary question rather than a second question.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 To approve the Monitoring Officer making changes to the Constitution (CP11 & CP16-CP19) as detailed in Appendix 2 to reflect the proposal set out in the report.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Council had to reconvene four of its six scheduled meetings in the last full municipal year. The longest extraordinary meeting lasted one hour and 17 minutes. Another lasted just over an hour while the other meetings lasted less than an hour.
- 3.2 Under the proposed changes, questioners would continue to give advance notice of their opening question and would retain their right to a supplementary question without advance notice. The opening question and its response would be printed and available shortly before the meeting. They would also be published on CMIS on the day of the meeting.
- 3.3 The proposals would have the following advantages:
- Prepared questions and responses would not be read out, saving time during the meeting.
  - The early availability of the printed responses would enable the questioner time to consider an appropriate supplementary question.
  - This should ease the problem that continues to exist where the supplementary question sometimes does not relate to the response received.
  - The likelihood of extraordinary meetings being required would be reduced.
- 3.4 Questions from the public are currently required by noon, five working days in advance of the meeting. Under the proposals, the deadline would remain the same, according members of the public the same amount of time to prepare questions as they have currently.

<b>For more information contact:</b>	David Walsh 01332 255503 e-mail david.walsh@derby.gov.uk
<b>Background papers:</b>	None
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 - Implications Appendix 2 – detail of proposed Constitutional changes.

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>
---------------------

**Financial**

1. None.

**Legal**

2. Under Article 15, changes to the Constitution can only be approved by the full Council after consideration of a report by the Monitoring Officer.

**Personnel**

3. None.

**Equalities Impact**

4. These changes will slightly reduce access by the public at Council meetings but this will be outweighed by a more effective and informative process.

**Corporate Priorities**

5. Better management of public questions at Council meetings will help to improve local democracy.



Proposed additional wording in **bold**

## General

- CP11 Members of the public who are on the Derby register of electors, or are Derby Council Taxpayers or Non Domestic Ratepayers, may ask questions of members of the Council Cabinet or Chair of a Commission or Committee **before** ordinary meetings of the Council. **Questions will receive a written response in advance of the meeting and questioners will have an opportunity to orally ask a supplementary question at the meeting.** Unless the Council, in exceptional circumstances, decides otherwise, the maximum period of time for questions by the public at a Council meeting shall be thirty minutes.

## Record of questions

- CP16 The Director of Corporate and Adult Services will enter each question in a book open to public inspection and will immediately send a copy of the question to the member to whom it is to be put. Rejected questions will include reasons for rejection. Copies of all questions **and answers** will be circulated to all members and will be made available to the public attending the meeting. **A list of questions and answers will also be published on the council website on the day of the meeting.**

## Asking the a **supplementary** question at the meeting

- CP17 The Mayor will invite the questioner to put the **a supplementary** question to the **relevant** member ~~named in the notice.~~ **The supplementary question may be put without notice and must arise directly out of the written reply to the original question. The Mayor may reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds in Rule CP15.** ~~If a questioner who has submitted a written question is unable to be present, he/she may ask the Mayor to put the question on his/her behalf. In the absence of the questioner, the Mayor may ask the question on the questioner's behalf, indicate that a written reply will be given or decide that the question will not be dealt with.~~

## Supplementary question

- CP18 ~~A questioner who has put a question in person may also put one supplementary question without notice to the member who has replied to his or her original question. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the reply. The Mayor may reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds in Rule CP15 above.~~

More...

## Written answers

CP19      The time allocated for questions at each meeting will be thirty minutes; ~~any questions not answered at the end of that time will be answered in writing.~~ Any **supplementary** question that cannot be dealt with during public question time because of the non-attendance of the member to whom it was to be put, will be dealt with by a written answer. All questions submitted in accordance with Rule CP13 will receive a written answer. ~~A copy of all questions and replies will be circulated to all members within fourteen days of the Council meeting~~

ENDS