

Public and Councillor Questions at Council meetings

Purpose

- 1.1 At the meeting of Council held on 20 January 2021, it was moved by Councillor Shanker and seconded by Councillor Ingall that the Public and Councillor Questions procedure be amended to remove the requirement for questions published in the printed booklet to be read out during the meeting.
- 1.2 As required by Council Procedure Rule CP87, any motion to permanently amend Council Procedure Rules stands adjourned until the following meeting, pending a report of the Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services.
- 1.3 This report gives effect to the motion and presents amendments to the Council Procedure Rules for consideration and potential adoption by Council.

Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the proposed changes to the Public and Councillor Questions procedure as detailed at paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5.
- 2.2 To approve the required alteration of Rule CP24 in the Council Constitution to facilitate the change, as detailed at paragraph 4.7.
- 2.3 To agree that the changes will take effect from the meeting of Council to be scheduled in July 2021.

Reasons

- 3.1 Council has resolved to suspend the requirement for published responses to be read out at three consecutive meetings, owing to the high volume of questions received. Councillors Shanker and Ingall have therefore requested that a permanent amendment to the Council Procedure Rules is considered. The matter now requires debate and determination by Council.
- 3.2 Public and Councillor Questions are not taken at the Annual General Meeting. The next meeting at which Council Questions will be received is therefore likely to be scheduled for July 2021.

Supporting information

- 4.1 The inclusion of public and member questions at Council meetings is entirely discretionary and provisions are locally agreed. The existing procedure rules were adopted in May 2018.

Current Arrangements

- 4.2 At present, opening questions by the public and councillors and responses by Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs are published one hour prior to the start of the Council meeting, via the Democracy Portal. Those putting questions are provided with this opportunity to consider their supplementary response.
- 4.3 During the meeting, a summary of the question is provided by a Council Officer and the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chair reads out the response published in the booklet. The questioner is then provided with an opportunity to ask a supplementary question and a verbal response is provided.

Summary of changes for consideration

- 4.4 It is proposed that the advanced publication of written responses ahead of the meeting is retained in its present form.
- 4.5 It is also recommended that the summary of the published question provided by a Council Officer is retained, to provide context to any supplementary question asked. However, it is proposed that the requirement for members to respond verbally to the initial question is removed, where a published response has been provided.

Constitutional Amendments

- 4.6 Council Procedure Rule CP24 currently reads as follows:

"Where an answer has been provided to a question in the published document and the questioner wishes to ask a supplementary question under CP27, a summary of the question will be put orally at the meeting by an officer and the member will respond."

- 4.7 It is proposed that the rule is amended to read as follows:

"Where an answer has been provided to a question in the published document and the questioner wishes to ask a supplementary question under CP27, a summary of the question will be put orally at the meeting by an officer. Where an answer has been provided in the published document, the response will not be read out and the supplementary question will be immediately put."

- 4.8 The Council Questions process is detailed in Council Procedure Rules CP11 to CP34. No further constitutional amendments are required to give effect to the change under discussion.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 None. This report is constitutionally mandated following the motion moved by Councillor Shanker at the meeting of 20 January 2021.

Other options

- 6.1 To take no further action and retain the existing provisions for Public and Councillor Questions.
- 6.2 To request that alternative constitutional amendments are prepared in relation to Public and Councillor Questions that give effect to the wishes of Council.

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 None.

Legal implications

- 8.1 There is no statutory requirement to receive public and councillor questions. The existing process is locally agreed and incorporated within the Council Constitution.

Climate implications

- 9.1 None directly arising.

Other significant implications

- 10.1 None directly arising.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal		
Finance		
Service Director(s)	Emily Feenan, Director of Legal, Procurement and Democratic Services	12 February 2021
Report sponsor	Simon Riley, Strategic Director of Corporate Resources	14 February 2021
Other(s)		

Background papers:	None.
List of appendices:	None.