



**Committee and Date**

Council  
18<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Item

Public



## Member and Public Questions Procedure

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<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):</b>	Cllr Lezley Picton, Leader		

### 1. Synopsis

This short report seeks approval to amend the Constitution to formally establish an updated approach to member questions at Council previously approved by Group Leaders.

### 2. Executive Summary

Following a question at the last meeting of full Council, the Leader agreed to review the way in which Member Questions are dealt with. Following discussions between the Group Leaders it has been agreed that Member questions should be moved from their current point at the end of the agenda and moved to immediately following public questions. The question and answer will be read out in the same way as other Council meetings and, in addition, it is proposed that the notice period for both member and public questions at all Cabinet, Council and Committee meetings where such questions can be asked, should be amended as explained in more detail below.

### 3. Recommendations

That Council authorises the Assistant Director – Legal and Governance to make the necessary amendments to the Council Procedure Rules to bring into effect the arrangements proposed at Section 7 below – namely

- 3.1. To move the member question time item at full Council from the end of the agenda to immediately follow the public question item
- 3.2. To set the notice period for submission of questions for full council and all other council committees to 12 noon on the fourth clear working day ahead of the meeting for both members of the council and members of the public
- 3.3. To allow up to ten minutes for Portfolio Holders/Committee Chairs to respond to questions at Full Council on Portfolio Holder and Scrutiny Chair Reports

## Report

### 4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The changes proposed are an opportunity to raise the profile of Member Questions and the issues of real concern to them and their local constituents. There are no obvious risks in taking the approach suggested other than it will take longer to reach the substantive agenda items.
- 4.2. By removing the need to submit Member questions 12 days prior to the meeting, and after the notice of the meeting has been published, it is more likely that questions will relate to the substantive items on the Council agenda.
- 4.3. For all other meetings, Officers will have slightly longer in order to prepare a draft response a response for the Portfolio Holder/Committee Chair.

### 5. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications resulting from these recommendations.

### 6. Climate Change Appraisal

There are no climate change implications resulting from these recommendations.

### 7. Background

#### Member question time at Full Council

- 7.1. The current Council Procedure Rules (“CPR”) provide that member questions will be the last item on the agenda of an ordinary meeting of the Council towards the end of each agenda (after Motions). Over time it has become custom and practice that member questions are not read out (and responded to) in full so, although available on the webpage for the meeting, the public do not hear the issues being raised other than through any supplementary question that may be asked.

- 7.2. The Group Leaders have agreed that this undermines and devalues the purpose of member questions and that accordingly they should appear on the Council agenda immediately following public questions. This report seeks formal authority for the Assistant Director – Legal and Governance to make the necessary amendments to the CPRs.
- 7.3. Currently we ask that 12 days' notice (CPR 15.4) is given for member questions so that they can be published together with the answers at the same time as the Council agenda. Again, the Group Leaders have agreed that we change that and adopt the same approach as we do with member and public questions to Cabinet and Committee meetings which require three clear days' notice.

#### Public and Member question deadline for all Council committees

- 7.4. Whilst considering this issue, it has been acknowledged that having such a short period of notice for Cabinet and other committee questions (from members and the public) can be a significant challenge for officers. For example, if Cabinet is on Wednesday and a member/public question comes in late on a Thursday, then if an officer is on leave on the Friday, they may not see the question until Monday morning which gives very little time to draft it and have it approved by the Portfolio Holder prior to Cabinet. As such, it is proposed that the deadline for all member and public questions for Council, Cabinet and Committees should be slightly extended to **12 noon on the fourth clear day before the meeting concerned** (i.e. not counting the day of the agenda publication or day of the meeting).

#### Multi-part questions

- 7.5. Whilst on this issue, all members of the Council and members of the public are asked to respect the principle set out in CPR 15.3 that "Multi-part questions will be refused if all parts do not relate clearly to the main question."

#### Portfolio Holder and Scrutiny Committee reports at Full Council

- 7.6. Finally, it is acknowledged that when responding to questions raised on Portfolio Holder and Annual Scrutiny Reports at Full Council meetings, it can be difficult to provide adequate answers within the standard five minutes allocated. It is suggested that the relevant Portfolio Holder and Scrutiny Chair be permitted up to ten minutes to respond and that this is made clear with the CPR

#### Issues in Preparing a Full Response

- 7.7. On rare occasions (for example if a key officer is on leave, or information will take some time to collate) it may not be possible for a full response to be provided in the time available. If this is the case, the Portfolio Holder will state when the response will be made available. The response when ready will be added to the webpage for the meeting and a link to that sent to all members. The answer to any supplementary question submitted by e-mail would also be published.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

**Local Member:** All

**Appendices**

None