
Governance Committee: Changes to Council Procedures

Background and context

- 1** The Chairman asked officers to review Council meeting procedures with a view to making the procedures more consistent and easier to understand.
- 2** The County Council's Standing Orders are in Part 4, Section 1 of the Constitution and in Standing Orders. Section 2 deals with procedures for the meetings of the County Council. The changes proposed are detailed below and **in Appendix 1**.

Proposal details

- 3** First, it is proposed to regularise the order of the agenda so that decision-making items are first, followed by the two-hour Question Time and motions after that. This should ensure the full length of question time on most occasions.
- 4** There are two items allowing member questions – the Question Time item and the Cabinet Member address. For Question Time, a member can ask unlimited supplementary questions and there is a five-minute time limit. For the Cabinet Member address, the Cabinet Member has five minutes to speak, then 15 minutes for member questions limited to one question and one supplementary.
- 5** It is proposed to have one supplementary question per member on both items, to give a Cabinet Member up to 10 minutes to address Council on a Cabinet Member Address and to have up to 10 minutes per topic on Question Time, starting at the beginning of each topic. The Chairman will expect questions and answers to be succinct to ensure that several questions on each topic can be taken.
- 6** For written questions it is proposed to put size limits on the questions and answers – 150 words for a question with an answer limited normally to 250.
- 7** For debates on decision-making items, such as the budget, policy frameworks, Governance and Standards Committee items, there is no time limit. For items to note such as annual reports there is no limit. Notices of motion have no overall time limit but have a five-minute time limit per speech.
- 8** It is proposed to make all debate speech limits five minutes, with the exception of speeches during the annual budget debate. The Governance Committee recommends that no change should be made to the length of speeches in petition debates (three minutes) as this would reduce the number of members able to speak during the half hour debate.
- 9** Simplification of the Notice of Motion process is also proposed. The Council has already agreed a presumption that a maximum of two motions be debated at each Council meeting. It is proposed that a motion will either be selected for debate or not but that there should be two chances for it to be selected. It is proposed that the referral to Cabinet Members be removed, although Cabinet Members will still be able to contact any proposer of a motion between meetings for an informal discussion. The proposed simplified Standing Order is set out below:

The Chairman, in consultation with political group leaders, may decide that a motion shall be:

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- (a) moved and debated at the next meeting (usually no more than two per meeting unless the Chairman determines otherwise); or
- (b) deferred so that it can be considered for selection to be moved and debated at the following meeting.

Any notice of motion not selected for debate after two meetings (not including the February Council meeting where the budget debate takes precedence) will fall away and cannot be resubmitted before six months from the date of the Council meeting for which it was last considered for selection.'

- 10** As a consequence of this proposal, it is recommended that the officer briefing notes currently produced for motions will only be produced for motions selected for debate at the meeting.
- 11** As these provisions cannot be applied retrospectively, motions submitted before 17 December 2021 will still be considered twice for possible debate. The six-month time limit before resubmission will start from the date of the meeting for which the motions were finally considered but not selected for debate.

Recommended

That the proposed changes to Part 4, Section 1 of the Constitution, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved.

Pete Bradbury

Chairman of Governance Committee

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Appendix

- Appendix 1 – Proposed changes to Part 4, Section 1, Council Standing Orders

Background papers

None