

---

## **Governance Committee: Changes to the Constitution**

### **County Council February Budget meeting**

#### **Background and context**

- 1** Each February, the County Council considers the Council Plan and budget to deliver it for the forthcoming year. This is a major debate each year and all members have the opportunity to speak without time limits. This is the only full County Council meeting debate with no time limits on speeches.
- 2** It is recognised in the Constitution that the plan and budget proposals will generate a lengthy debate and that there will be little time for other business. Standing Order 2.49 states that there is a presumption that notices of motion will not be considered at the February meeting. Question Time has not taken place at the last two budget meetings due to a lack of time.
- 3** The annual budget meeting typically lasts from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm (based on the average between 2017 and 2022). However, in February 2023, the meeting was unusually long, not finishing until 5.23 pm. The Committee has therefore reviewed how well the rules for this debate serve the interests of the Council and those with an interest in following the Council's business and has considered options for managing the length of time of the meeting and is proposing a minor change to Standing Orders.

#### **Proposal details**

- 4** Given the importance of the annual budget debate and the need to ensure an opportunity for as many members as possible to participate, it is proposed that Standing Orders be changed to remove non-urgent business from the agenda, to include Question Time, petitions, annual reports and scrutiny debates. The proposed amendments to Standing Orders are **set out at Appendix 1**. Officers will continue to try to avoid including any other items for decision on the agenda.
- 5** The Committee also considered options for managing timings at the budget meeting such as setting an overall time limit for the budget debate or an end time or setting individual time limits on speeches. However, it was felt that it would be wrong to artificially limit speeches and that members with points to make should be able to make them.
- 6** The Chairman and the Leader will encourage cabinet members to make sure their contributions are as succinct and relevant as possible but they should be given the opportunity to say what they want to achieve in the coming year. Leaders of opposition groups also need the opportunity to say what they would do differently and should have the same time available as those proposing the plan and budget.
- 7** The Committee therefore recommends that the current arrangements should be maintained where the Chairman manages the meeting through using his discretion to direct speakers to avoid overly lengthy, repetitive speeches and ensure the content is relevant to the debate.

#### **Recommended**

- (1)** That Standing Orders be amended to limit non-urgent business at the annual budget meeting, as set out in Appendix 1;

- 
- (2) That the current arrangements where the Chairman manages the meeting using his discretion to direct speakers to avoid overly lengthy, repetitive speeches and ensure content is relevant to the debate, be maintained;

## **Corporate Parenting Panel terms of reference**

### **Background and context**

- 8** The County Council's Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) is a multi-agency advisory Panel that meets at least four times a year to ensure the voice of the child is at the centre of services for children looked after and care leavers.
- 9** Following the updated terms of reference that were agreed by the County Council in December 2021, some further minor amendments are proposed to the membership to ensure the Panel is focused and effective. The revised terms of reference are **set out at Appendix 2**.

### **Proposal**

- 10** The proposed changes to the Corporate Parenting Panel terms of reference, as set out at Appendix 2, are summarised below:
- (a) **Membership:** It is proposed that it is no longer required that a Foster Panel member be a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel, but that there is regular liaison with the Chairman of the CPP and all Foster Panel members so that any relevant feedback can be passed to the Panel. Foster Panel members will also be invited to attend Panel meetings for relevant agenda items. Seven councillors sit on the CPP, which must include the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, two representatives from the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee and at least one minority group member.
- (b) **The Promise:** The Promise is a partnership commitment to support young people and care leavers added to the terms of reference in 2021 given the key role of CPP to monitor its delivery. The Promise has since been reviewed by children and young people to ensure it is relevant and influences the Service provision. As part of this the name has been updated to 'Our Aspiration' and the terms of reference updated to include this new version.
- 11** The Corporate Parenting Panel Chairman and the Assistant Director (Corporate Parenting) support the proposal. The four Foster Panel members were invited to comment on the proposal. The proposed terms of reference have also been shared with the Corporate Parenting Panel.

### **Recommended**

- (3) That the revised terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel, as set out in the Constitution, as set out at Appendix 2, be approved; and

## **Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee terms of reference**

### **Background and context**

- 12** The Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee (RAAC) is proposing changes to its terms of reference to:

- 
- Formalise a referral process within its terms of reference so that matters of concern identified by the Committee can be referred to the relevant forum within the Council;
  - Update out-of-date references to legislation and reword some paragraphs to better reflect the work of the Committee; and
  - Ensure that the Committee follows the latest Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA) guidance on independent co-opted members and on the description of the role of an audit committee.

### **Proposal details**

- 13** The proposed changes to RAAC's terms of reference in the Scheme of Delegation are **set out at Appendix 3**. The proposals do not change the role of the Committee, nor add any new areas of responsibility.
- 14** The changes reflect advice of senior County Council officers to ensure the terms of reference reflect the duties of the Committee and comply with legislation. They should provide greater transparency of the role of the Committee to elected members, officers and the public.
- 15** RAAC also wishes to increase the provision for independent co-opted members following advice from CIPFA that at least two such appointments should be made where possible, to build continuity and broaden the range of experience brought by independent co-opted members.

### **Recommended**

- (4) That the proposed changes to the terms of reference of the Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee, as set out at Appendix 3, be approved.

### **Pete Bradbury**

Chairman of Governance Committee

**Contact Officer:** Tony Kershaw, Director of Law and Assurance, Tel: 033 022 22662, [tony.kershaw@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:tony.kershaw@westsussex.gov.uk)

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Change to Standing Orders re Council budget debate
- Appendix 2 – Proposed changes to Corporate Parenting Panel terms of reference
- Appendix 3 - Proposed changes to the Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee terms of reference

### **Background papers:**

None