



To: The Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategy and Transformation: Councillor Lewis Herbert

Report by: Andrew Limb, Head of Corporate Strategy

Relevant scrutiny committee: Strategy & Resources 10/10/2016  
Scrutiny Committee

Wards affected: Abbey Arbury Castle Cherry Hinton Coleridge East Chesterton King's Hedges Market Newnham Petersfield Queen Edith's Romsey Trumpington West Chesterton

**AMENDMENTS TO GREATER CAMBRIDGE CITY DEAL JOINT ASSEMBLY & EXECUTIVE BOARD STANDING ORDERS**  
**Not a Key Decision**

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**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 This proposal to modify Standing Orders aims to improve the way public questions work at the Greater Cambridge City Deal Executive Board and Joint Assembly. Essentially the changes are to increase the amount of notice of question required before the meeting, whilst aiming to maintain the amount of time between publication of agenda and deadline for questions. The changes also ensure questions relate to agenda items (whilst retaining Chair's discretion on this), and limit the number of words in a question.
- 1.2 The proposals reflect learning for the first year and a half of the Executive Board and Joint Assembly, member feedback and suggestions from several key stakeholders representing those who have exercised their public speaking rights at the Board and Assembly. These are Cambridge Past, Present and Future, Federation of Cambridge Residents' Associations, Cambridge Cycling Campaign, Smarter Cambridge Transport, Coton Parish Council and Maddingley Parish Council.
- 1.3 In essence, by allowing more time between notice being given of public questions and the relevant meeting (whilst maintaining the time between publication of papers and the deadline for public questions), and making public questions more focused, transparency in decision-making and public information will be improved, as well as the efficient discharge of City Deal business.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- To endorse the proposed modified Standing Orders for the Greater Cambridge City Deal Joint Assembly and Executive Board to Council.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 For both the Joint Assembly and Executive Board, agendas and reports are currently published five clear working days before the relevant meeting. Each Executive Board meeting also considers a forward plan, which gives advance notice of decisions that are expected to be taken.
- 3.2 The existing Standing Orders for both Committees require notice to be given of public questions by 10am the day before the relevant meeting. Responses are then prepared by officers where appropriate, in order to advise Joint Assembly and Executive Board members on responding to questions in the meeting. Meetings of both Committees have to date often taken a larger number of questions than is generally the case with other Committees of the three partner Councils – the June 2016 Executive Board had 32 public questions.
- 3.3 Responses to public questions are currently published in the minutes of the relevant meeting.
- 3.4 Alongside the Joint Assembly and Executive Board, there are other forums through which members of the public can effectively engage with and ask questions to the City Deal. Where the infrastructure programme is concerned, questions can be asked at Local Liaison Forums, which have been established to allow local Members and the public in areas directly affected by schemes to engage with the detailed proposals and to keep informed of plans. These are useful forums for questions to be directed where they relate to specific schemes, and are able to provide detailed responses.
- 3.5 Officers are also available to answer questions across the City Deal programme if contacted, with the City Deal email address being the most obvious channel for queries.
- 3.6 Similar reports are being considered by the relevant Committees at Cambridgeshire County Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, as any changes to the Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for these Committees requires approval from all three

Councils. Proposed modifications are shown in the two Appendices with tracked changes. All three Councils will need to agree the changes as proposed in order for them to take effect.

### Quality of responses to public questions

- 3.7 Members of the public, officers and members all consider that the current turnaround time of just over one day allowed between receipt of public questions and the relevant meeting means that often detailed and technical questions are not always answered sufficiently. The proposed modifications to the Standing Orders of both committees are intended to give officers more time to advise Joint Assembly and Executive Board members on the issues involved in those public questions, and therefore to improve the quality of responses given at the meetings, while ensuring the public have the same length of time to prepare their questions.
- 3.8 Increasing the time allowed for preparation of responses as proposed would also allow for questions and responses to be more effectively published, including where questions are not fully answered in the relevant meetings, so responses would be more easily accessible. This would also facilitate an aspiration to publish written responses to some questions where possible in advance of the relevant meeting, where those questions are of a technical nature.
- 3.9 By bringing forward both the deadline for receipt of public questions and the publication period for agendas and reports, the proposed modifications would retain the existing time period between publication of agendas and the deadline for submitting questions. It should be noted that this would mean reports needing to be completed 2-3 days earlier than is currently the case, although with effective work planning that should not be problematic.

### Implications of not approving the proposed changes

- 3.10 If the Executive Councillor chooses not to support the recommendations, the existing Standing Orders would continue to be in force.

## **4. Implications**

### **(a) Financial Implications**

n/a

### **(b) Staffing Implications**

Officers will have more time to prepare more complete answers to public questions ahead of meetings.

(c) **Equality and Poverty Implications**

No differential equality implications are anticipated from this decision not least since the time available for stakeholders to prepare and submit a question is expected to be maintained). An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed.

(d) **Environmental Implications**

n/a

(e) **Procurement**

n/a

(f) **Consultation and communication**

The proposed changes have arisen from a proactive proposal by key stakeholders to improve the functioning of public questions at City Deal meetings.

The proposed changes have been discussed with members of the City Deal Executive Board and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the City Deal Joint Assembly. They have also been discussed with the authors of the letter.

(g) **Community Safety**

n/a

## 5. Background papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Standing Orders for the City Deal Joint Assembly and Executive Board

## 6. Appendices

**Appendix 1** Proposed modifications to Joint Assembly Standing orders, Relevant extracts

**Appendix 2** Proposed modifications to Executive Board Standing Orders, Relevant extracts

## 7. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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## **Appendix 1: Proposed modifications to Joint Assembly Standing orders**

### **Relevant extracts**

#### **7. Notice of and summons to meetings**

- 7.1 Notice will be given to the public of the time and place of any meeting of the Joint Assembly in accordance with the Access to Information rules of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- 7.2 At least five clear working days before a meeting, a copy of the agenda and associated papers will be sent to every member of the Joint Assembly. Other than in exceptional circumstances this will take place one week before the deadline for submission of public questions. The agenda will give the date, time and place of each meeting and specify the business to be transacted, and will be accompanied by such details as are available.

#### **8. Meeting frequency**

The Joint Assembly may set its own timetable for meetings but will initially meet quarterly, normally on a date preceding meetings of the Executive Board in order to allow the Assembly to consider issues the Board will be taking decisions on and advise accordingly.

#### **11. Questions by the public and public speaking**

At the discretion of the Chairman, members of the public may ask questions at meetings of the Joint Assembly. This standard protocol is to be observed by public speakers:

- (a) notice of the question should be given to the Democratic Services team at South Cambridgeshire District Council (as administering authority) by 10am at least three working days before the meeting;
- (b) questions must be limited to a maximum of 300 words;
- (b) questioners will not be permitted to raise the competence or performance of a member, officer or representative of any partner on the Joint Assembly, nor any matter involving exempt information (normally considered as 'confidential');
- (c) questioners cannot make any abusive or defamatory comments;
- (d) if any clarification of what the questioner has said is required, the Chairman will have the discretion to allow other Assembly members to ask questions;
- (e) the questioner will not be permitted to participate in any subsequent discussion and will not be entitled to vote;
- (f) the Chairman will decide when and what time will be set aside for questions depending on the amount of business on the agenda for the meeting. Normally questions will be received as the first substantive item of the meeting;
- (g) individual questioners will be permitted to speak for a maximum of three minutes;
- (h) in the event of questions considered by the Chairman as duplicating one another, it may be necessary for a spokesperson to be nominated to put forward the question on behalf of other questioners. If a spokesperson cannot be nominated or agreed, the questioner of the first such question received will be entitled to put forward their question.
- (i) a question must indicate which agenda item it relates to (and must relate to only one agenda item; multiple questions can be asked if the questioner wishes to ask about more than one agenda item). If the question does not relate to any agenda item, the Chairman has discretion to allow it to be asked, and to select the point in the meeting at which it is asked.

## **Appendix 2: Proposed modifications to Executive Board Standing Orders**

### **Relevant extracts**

#### **7. Notice of and summons to meetings**

- 7.1 Notice will be given to the public of the time and place of any meeting of the Executive Board in accordance with the Access to Information rules of South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- 7.2 At least five clear working days before a meeting, a copy of the agenda and associated papers will be sent to every member of the Executive Board. Other than in exceptional circumstances this will take place one week before the deadline for submission of public questions. The agenda will give the date, time and place of each meeting and specify the business to be transacted, and will be accompanied by such details as are available.

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At the discretion of the Chairman, members of the public may ask questions at meetings of the Executive Board. This standard protocol is to be observed by public speakers:

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- (b) questions should be limited to a maximum of 300 words;
- (b) questioners will not be permitted to raise the competence or performance of a member, officer or representative of any partner on the Executive Board, nor any matter involving exempt information (normally considered as 'confidential');
- (c) questioners cannot make any abusive or defamatory comments;
- (d) if any clarification of what the questioner has said is required, the Chairman will have the discretion to allow other Board members to ask questions;
- (e) the questioner will not be permitted to participate in any subsequent discussion and will not be entitled to vote;
- (f) the Chairman will decide when and what time will be set aside for questions depending on the amount of business on the agenda for the meeting. Normally questions will be received as the first substantive item of the meeting;
- (g) individual questioners will be permitted to speak for a maximum of three minutes;
- (h) in the event of questions considered by the Chairman as duplicating one another, it may be necessary for a spokesperson to be nominated to put forward the question on behalf of other questioners. If a spokesperson cannot be nominated or agreed, the questioner of the first such question received will be entitled to put forward their question.
- (i) questions should relate to items that are on the agenda for discussion at the meeting in question. The Chairman will have the discretion to allow questions to be asked on other issues if it is a pressing issue.