



Item

REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE- RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GOVERNANCE REFERENCE GROUP 9/10/23

To:

Civic Affairs Committee 18/10/2023

Report by:

Robert Pollock, Chief Executive

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Wards affected:

All

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to consider recommendations from the Governance Reference Group (GRG), a non-decision making body, for Council to consider on 19 October 2023.

2. Recommendations

To recommend to Council:

- To pause area committee meetings for two cycles (approximately half a year) after November/December 2023. (para 3.3-3.5)
- That Council Procedure Rules (Appendix A2 Rules of Debate on the Budget) is amended to change the length of speeches per group from up to 45 minutes to up to 15 minutes, and to note that the Council meeting on 15 February 2024 will deal with all agenda business and the scheduled 'follow on' Council meeting date of 29 February 2024 is therefore no longer required. (para 4.3)

- To change the deadline for Oral Questions from midday before the day of a Council meeting (noon two days before for the Annual Meeting) to the Friday before-ie the same deadline as Written Questions. To limit the number of Oral Questions for consideration at any meeting to 12 and that a majority of those received are to come from opposition councillors. The Mayor will have authority to allow additional questions deemed to be of an urgent nature. (para 4.4)
- Public Questions (except for Planning Committee) to be received in writing, in full, by noon two days before a meeting, not read out, with a Councillor reply of up to two minutes, a public supplementary of up to two minutes and a councillor reply to that of up to two minutes. (para 4.5)

3. Background

- 3.1 On 20 September 2023 this Committee considered and agreed the terms of reference of a Councillor working group (GRG) and its work programme and indicative timeline.
- 3.2 On 9 October 2023, the GRG met to consider further Area Committees and 'quick wins' to smooth and make more effective some of the Council's procedures and processes.

Area Committees

- 3.3 GRG considered on 11 September and then again on 9 October (see appended report), the current position for Area Committees. GRG concurs with one of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's recommendations (from February 2022) that Council should pause holding Area Committees, but that should be after the November/December cycle of scheduled meetings and the pause should be for the following two cycles ie until September 2024. GRG had considered an immediate pause, however, there is an already planned for round of Environment Improvement Programme Grants to be consulted on (but not decided, as

Area Committees by nature of being on-line cannot make decisions). This also gives more notice of the pause.

- 3.4 During the pause, GRG has asked that officers keep it updated on progress for options of alternative arrangements, which GRG will consider as part of its future work.
- 3.5 GRG noted that the Liberal Democrat members did not support a pause.

4. **Council Procedure Quick Wins**

- 4.1 GRG considered individual Councillor suggestions for what was badged as a 'quick win'. These were suggestions that would require minimal resource to implement, no adverse effect on our governance-more a change in custom and practice to benefit (primarily) Councillors but also those engaging with the Council's democratic practices.
- 4.2 GRG recommends changes to the Council Budget debate, Oral Questions at Council and Public Questions to Meetings (other than Planning Committees).

Council Budget Meeting

- 4.3 The Budget Meeting has separate rules for debate. These allow for each political group to speak in introducing its budget, or alternative budget, for up to 45 minutes. GRG recommend that this is reduced to up to 15 minutes per political group. GRG believes that this will enable the 15 February 2024 Council meeting to deal with all agenda business rather than the adjourned meeting approach (ie two dates but one meeting) which had been used in the budget cycle 2022 and 2023.

Oral Questions

- 4.4 Some members proposed deleting Oral Questions as a Council Agenda Item. However, GRG recommends a limit of up to 12 oral questions per Agenda. A majority of those received should be from opposition councillors (and that the number of opposition questions should be in proportion to political group size). GRG also agreed to an earlier deadline so Oral Questions will be submitted by noon on the Friday before the Council meeting, as is the case for Written Questions. The

Mayor has the authority to allow Oral Questions deemed of an urgent nature.

Public Questions

4.5 GRG recommends changes to the scheme as follows:

- all questions must be in writing in full to allow for publication before the meeting
- the question will not be read out
- an answer will be given (2 minutes)
- a supplementary may be asked (2 minutes)
- an answer will be given (2 minutes)

No change to submitting public questions by noon two days before the meeting and up to 30 minutes allocated to public question time.

Some members requested that if questions are of a similar topic then the members of the public are grouped together as far as possible. Officer do try to arrange this, within the boundaries of sharing personal data and individual member of the public preferences.

4.6 GRG considered other submitted quick wins, but there was no agreement and these will need to be considered further covering:

- Notice of Motions
- Use of an earlier guillotine for Council Meetings
- Changing the time of the Annual Council Meeting

5. Implications

As part of its on-going work programme, GRG will be monitoring the implications of the changes proposed in this report and report back to Civic Affairs Committee as appropriate.

6. Appendices

Reports to GRG on Area Committees 11.9.23 and 9.10.23

8. Contact

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