

Public consultation on public involvement in the democratic decision making process

The Council has voted to change its governance structure from an executive/cabinet model to a committee system model, under which decision making will take place within various politically balanced committees, rather than under the current executive/cabinet system where the majority of decision making by Councillors is performed by the Leader and the cabinet members they have appointed, either individually or collectively.

The Council wants to ensure that its residents and businesses are able to effectively input into the democratic decision-making process. The Council has therefore decided to consult about proposals to allow residents and businesses to participate in public question time at meetings of the Council.

Residents and businesses will still be able to contact their local Councillors about any matters of concern to them, and in accordance with any relevant procedures they may also (among other things):

- Attend at Council meetings and access agendas, reports, background papers and minutes (unless involving exempt or confidential information);
- Speak at meetings of the Planning Committee when it is considering applications for planning permission;
- Speak and ask questions when licensing and registration matters are being considered at a committee meeting;
- Present petitions;
- Participate in question time at meetings of the Council; and
- Make complaints;

The Council currently has a procedure under which members of the public can ask questions of the Leader and other members of the cabinet at meetings of full Council. The Council intends to retain the arrangements for public questions however these will need to be amended to reflect the committee system model. An outline of the suggested draft arrangements is set out below. Please note that these are only suggestions at this stage and may be subject to change.

Below full Council it is currently intended that there will be two policy committees which will be responsible for taking the majority of decisions made by Councillors on behalf of the Council, being the Resources Committee and the Environment and Communities Committee. There will also be regulatory and statutory committees (Licensing Committee and Planning Committee), and governance committees. The proposed committee structure is set out at Schedule 1.

The Council proposes to permit questions to be asked at meetings of the following:

- (a) full Council;
- (b) Resources Committee; and
- (c) Environment and Communities Committee.

Draft arrangements for public questions

- 1.1 Members of the public may ask questions of [to be determined] at [ordinary meetings of: the Council; Resources Committee; Communities and Environment Committee].
- 1.2 A question may only be asked where at least ten clear working days' written notice (which includes by email) has been given prior to the day of the meeting to the Head of Paid Service by the person proposing to ask the question.
- 1.3 The person proposing to ask the question must supply their name and address, and the name or role of the Councillor to whom the question is put.
- 1.4 No one person may submit more than one question per meeting, and if submitted on behalf of an organisation, no more than one question may be submitted on behalf of that organisation per meeting.
- 1.5 The Monitoring Officer may reject a question if it:
 - 1.5.1 is not about a matter for which the Council has responsibility or which affects the district;
 - 1.5.2 is out of order, unlawful, irregular or improper;
 - 1.5.3 is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting in the preceding six months; or
 - 1.5.4 will require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.
- 1.6 Where a question is rejected, the Monitoring Officer will inform the person who submitted the question of that rejection, together with reasons, as soon as is reasonably practicable after making such a decision.
- 1.7 Where a question is accepted the Head of Paid Service will as soon as is reasonably practicable send a copy of the question to the Councillor to whom it is addressed. Copies of all accepted questions will be set out in the relevant meeting agenda.
- 1.8 The Chair will invite the person who submitted the question to put their question to the Councillor to whom it is addressed in person. If the person who submitted the question is unable to be present, they may ask the Chair to put the question on their behalf, who may agree to do so or may instead determine that the question will not be dealt with.

- 1.9 Any valid question which cannot be dealt with during public question time, for example because of a lack of time or because of the absence of the Councillor to whom it was put (or a suitable alternative Councillor), will be dealt with by written answer, which will be sent to the person who put the question within ten clear working days from the next working day following the meeting. Written answers will also be circulated to all Councillors and published on the Council's website.
- 1.10 Unless the Chair decides otherwise, no discussion will take place on any question or response, but any Councillor may move that a matter which has arisen directly out of the question or any reply, be referred to another committee of the Council for discussion. Once seconded, such a motion shall be voted upon without discussion.
- 1.11 Public question time shall be limited to [to be determined].

Draft

SCHEDULE 1

