



## REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

### REVISION OF PROCEDURE FOR COUNCIL QUESTIONS

For many years, 30 minutes has been available at Council for questions about the business of the Council and matters affecting the borough. Members, having given notice of their main question and received the initial answer may then ask without notice a supplementary question. The number of questions put down for answer is invariably over 20 and often near 30, but it is now rare for more than nine or 10 questions to be answered. As well as the number of questions, the complexity of many means that a considerable amount of research has to be undertaken in a patently short period as questions currently have to be submitted six working days before the Council meeting.

The reduction in the size of the officer structure together with the number and complexity of questions is resulting in the answers being completed very close to the Council meeting and often requires Cabinet Members to consider the draft replies at very short notice.

To address this problem, the Governance Committee suggest that the notice period for the deposit of questions should be extended to 11 working days before the Council meeting. This will enable answers to be prepared in a comprehensive manner, including sufficient time for Cabinet Members to include their input into the final replies.

The Mayor will still be able to permit the asking of an urgent question where a matter of importance has arisen after the normal closing date for questions. In order that more questions can be answered orally, the Committee also suggests that the number of questions be limited to a maximum of 15. There will be no time limit.

Currently, questions that do not receive an oral answer receive a written answer. This is appropriate when there is uncertainty about the number of questions that will receive an oral reply. If the Council decides to fix the number of questions that will receive an oral reply then there is no need to have a 'reserve' list that may or may not receive an oral response. It is proposed that once the 15 questions have been submitted any subsequent questions will be treated as member enquiries and will receive a written response in the normal manner.

There are already provisions in the Council Procedure Rules to ensure a fair distribution of questions. These provisions will be retained.

**The Committee accordingly now RECOMMENDS to the Council that:**

- 1. Rule 10.2(i) of the Council Procedure Rules (Notice of Questions) be amended to read:**

**“They have given 11 clear days’ notice in writing to the Proper Officer signed by the Member or by the Group Leader on behalf of that Member”**

**and the timetable in the Appendix to the Rules be amended accordingly.**

- 2. That rule 10.6 of the Council Procedure Rules (Time for Questions) be amended to read:**

**“Number of Questions**

**A maximum of 15 questions can be submitted for a Council meeting all of which together with any supplementary questions under rule 10.5 will receive an oral reply at the meeting. Any questions in excess of the maximum number that are submitted will be treated as a Member enquiry and receive a written response.”**