



GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Subject Heading:	Revision of Procedure for Council Questions
CMT Lead:	Ian W. Burns
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Policy context:	
Financial summary:	There are no financial implications involved in this report

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough	<input type="checkbox"/>
Championing education and learning for all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

With the formation of a fifth Group on the Council (UKIP) and following consultation with the Administration, proposals are put forward to revise the procedure for deciding the number of Council questions which can be submitted at a Council meeting. The report also reviews the current distribution rights for Council questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee to consider this report.
2. That this Committee recommend to Council whether the maximum number of questions is 15 or 16 or some other number.
3. That rule 10.6(a) of the Council Procedure Rules (Notice of Questions) is amended to read:

“A maximum of 15/16 questions can be submitted for a Council meeting all of which together 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.”

4. That this Committee decides whether to retain the current distribution of questions rights or amend it to one of the options suggested in paragraph 4 of this report.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Earlier this year, this Council agreed that a maximum of 15 questions could be submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Council, with the 30-minute timeframe for consideration removed.
2. Since then, the political make-up of the Council has changed. Firstly, a UKIP councillor was elected in a by-election in March 2013; and then there was the defection of 3 former Conservative Members to UKIP, thereby creating a fifth Group on the Council.
3. Having consulted with the Administration, it is proposed that the maximum number of questions which can be submitted to a meeting of the Council be increased to 16. This would, in theory, allow the submission of a maximum of 4 questions per opposition group, subject to each group using its full allocation.
4. There are already provisions in the Council Procedure Rules to ensure a fair distribution of questions between the Groups. These provisions, which appear to be well received could be retained, or if a change was desired two other possible options for sharing questions are suggested:
 - (a) That all the questions are shared out in the approximate proportions as the ration of seats held by each opposition party, e.g. with 16 questions the ratio would be Residents 8, Labour 4, IRG 2 and UKIP 2.
 - (b) That a lower number of the questions were reserved to each opposition party with a ‘first come, first served’ for the remainder, e.g. Residents 5, Labour 2, IRG 1 and UKIP 1 with 7 questions available to all (assuming a total of 16 questions).

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Legal implications and risks:

The governance of Council meetings is largely an internal matter for the Council, so there are no direct legal implications from these proposals.

Financial implications and risks:

There are no direct financial implications from these proposals. Officer time is already taken up with preparing answers to questions and member enquiries, and the proposals will mean no specific changes in staffing structures/deployment.

Human Resources implications and risks:

There are no direct human resource implications

Equalities implications and risks:

No equalities implications and risks have been identified as a result of the proposed changes to the Council Meeting procedure as there are already provisions in the Council Procedure Rules to ensure a fair distribution of questions answered at Council meetings.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None