

Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting: 24 January 2011

Report: Constitution & Member Services Scrutiny Panel

Subject: Review of Executive Procedure Rule 1.6

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Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendation:

That the following amendments to Executive Procedure Rule 1.6 be approved:

- (a) the requirement to complete all business at a Cabinet meeting by 10.00pm be deleted; and**
- (b) the requirement to hold a minimum of 12 Cabinet meetings a year be deleted.**

1. Executive Procedure Rule 1.6 (page H3 of the Constitution) currently states that:

"The Executive will meet at least 12 times per year at times to be agreed by the Leader. The Executive shall meet at the Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ or another location to be agreed by the Leader. Meetings will commence at 7.00 p.m. and all business shall be concluded by 10.00 p.m."

2. This rule was agreed by the Council at its meeting held on 13 February 2003 (minute 10), and subsequently business not concluded by the 10.00pm threshold has been referred to the next meeting or voted upon without debate, at the discretion of the Chairman.

3. The Cabinet meeting held on 13 September 2010 was the second Cabinet meeting of the municipal year to extend past the 10.00pm threshold. Concern was expressed, and we were requested by the Cabinet to examine this 'guillotine' procedure with a view to removing it.

4. We have received a report detailing the measures that have currently been implemented in an effort to reduce pressure on Cabinet Agendas. These include the creation of the Cabinet Agenda Planning Group, agenda items being ranked according to significance, and all draft Cabinet reports being scrutinised as to whether they could be dealt with as a delegated decision by the relevant Portfolio Holder.

5. We believe that if the 'guillotine' procedure were removed from the Constitution it, along with these other measures, would enable the Cabinet to complete all the items of

business on an agenda in one meeting. This would remove the need to make decisions without debate, avoid delaying possibly important decisions to the next meeting, or restricting discussion. It is our view that these changes would be beneficial to the democratic process, and to the public perception of these decisions.

Number of Cabinet Meetings per Year

6. It has been noted that Executive Procedure Rule 1.6 also contains a requirement to hold a minimum of twelve Cabinet meetings per year. Since then, the number of Cabinet meetings has gradually been reduced to the current eight per year.

7. We feel that, owing to the need to economise in the number of meetings held each year and the various measures already in place to reduce pressure on Cabinet Agendas, that this requirement should be deleted.

8. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.