

Representations by Councillor Gary Waller concerning Cabinet/Overview & Scrutiny Liaison

“Dear Ian

I was glad to have a discussion with you last week about the role of scrutiny within EFDC and how it might be improved. I've thought about this matter since then, and I feel that the two changes which could be most effective would be 1) reforming questions, both with and without notice, including those from the public, at Council meetings; and 2) introducing at least one session annually at which the Leader would be questioned on his programme by members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

As far as 1) is concerned, I would combine the separate items on the agenda set aside for questions into one question time when, say, up to 20 minutes would be set aside to deal with questions on specific topics for which notice would be given, and addressed to any Cabinet member. Each questioner would then have an opportunity to ask a supplementary question for which notice would not be given but which would have to be linked to the original question. Possibly other members could also have an opportunity to ask a supplementary question (as happens in the House of Commons). During the available time it might be possible to get through five or six questions together with supplementaries, although it would be necessary for the Chairman to control the process quite tightly to ensure, for instance, that supplementaries were related to the original questions. Since we spoke last week, I have discovered that Harlow Council organises its questions in this kind of way, allowing the public to put questions in addition to councillors, and I hope to attend a Council meeting to see how well it works.

Turning to 2), what I have in mind is a session not unlike that which takes place when the Prime Minister meets the Liaison Committee (made up of Select Committee chairs) around three times a year. As there wouldn't be a limit on the scope nor the number of questions which could be put by a member, it would be possible to probe in some depth on any particular subject. I guess this session could be of something like one and a half hours in duration, so issues could be considered quite fully. I presume that this innovation could perhaps be introduced without any changes to the Council's constitution.

As I indicated, I don't think that scrutiny is particularly effective at present, but the introduction of these changes could make quite a difference. I don't know how the Task and Finish Panel intends to look into the matter of scrutiny, but I would welcome an opportunity to discuss it with the Panel's members.

Kind regards
Gary”