

Appendix 5

Report to the Council



Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** 24 April 2007
Chairman: Councillor R Morgan **Item:**

1. COUNCIL MEETINGS - REGULATION OF QUESTION TIME AND REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Recommending:

- (1) That question time at Council meetings in respect of questions on Portfolio Holder/Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports and unscripted questions be managed by the Chairman on the following basis:
 - (a) the twenty-minute period being allocated to both categories of question with no specific timings allocated to either;
 - (b) the Chairman to be enabled to extend the period of twenty minutes by up to a further 10 minutes so as to ensure that all political groups and independent members may have their questions answered;
 - (c) the Chairman of the Council to ensure that questions by members are dealt with in the order in which they are put and that all questions from each political group and from independent members receive a reply; and
 - (2) To note that the Constitution and Member Services Standing Scrutiny Panel has considered draft revisions to financial regulations and is reporting separately to this meeting under delegated authority from this Committee on 7 March 2007.
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Council Question Time

- 1.1 Approximately 12 months' ago, the Council agreed proposals for making Council meetings more participative. These arrangements included the allocation of 20 minutes within the Council meeting for questions on portfolio holders' written reports and for unscripted questions by members of the Council. One outstanding issue remained to be dealt with, namely how the use of this 20-minute period was to be regulated.
- 1.2 We have looked at a number of options for running the 20-minute session. We have concluded that this is best managed by the Chairman of the Council to avoid

procedures which become unwieldy or difficult to operate. We are thus not recommending any constitutional changes on this matter but simply some broad guidance to the Chairman of Council.

- 1.3 We are appreciative of the way in which the present Chairman of Council has run these sessions. She has allocated the first 10 minutes to questions on written reports and the remaining 10 minutes to unscripted questions. We are recommending that this strict division of timings within the 20 minutes should be replaced by a more flexible approach whereby questions on either subject can be asked at any time within the 20-minutes.
- 1.4 We also feel that in order to deal with occasions where there may be more questions than time available, the Chairman of the Council should have the authority to extend the session by up to 10 minutes if need be.
- 1.5 Finally, we also recommend that the Chairman should be supported in dealing with the political groups and independent members on a fair basis. We recommend that the Chairman should ensure that all questions from Councillors must be answered. This links with the provision for extending the period of question time so as to ensure there is no feeling of bias in regard to the order in which questions are taken.

Review of Financial Regulations

- 1.6 The Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel has previously reported to the Council under delegated authority on a review of officer delegations and contract standing orders. The one remaining aspect of this review was Financial Regulations and which has now been considered.
- 1.7 The Panel has now completed a review of Financial Regulations and is reporting separately to this meeting.