

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**Democratic Services Committee
29.07.2019**

REPORT BY: Head of Democratic Services

SUBJECT: Questions at Council and Speaking at Council Meetings

REPORT FOR: Decision, Information and Discussion

1. Questions by Members Considered at Council.

The numbers of questions being raised by Members at Council meetings seems to be increasing. Over the last 12 months the numbers have been as follows:

July 18	16
October 18	27
January 19	14
March 19 (budget)	8
July 19	21

Other Council Meetings (5) have not had any questions as they were the Annual, Appointment of Chief Officer, Special or Budget meetings. There have been comments from Members regarding the value of asking questions at Council as well as regarding the length of Council meetings. As the Council has been operating this process for a few years it is an opportune time to consider whether the process needs to be amended.

- 1.2 Currently Members have to submit questions at least 10 clear days before the Council meeting. There is also a limit of 2 questions per Member (potentially 130 questions in total if every non-Cabinet Member utilised their full quota). There is no time limit for dealing with questions or a maximum number of questions that can be considered at a Council meeting.
- 1.3 A review of all other Council Constitutions in Wales has shown that the Council's practice of allowing questions to the Leader, Cabinet Members and Chairs of Committees is the same as other Councils, as is the requirement for notice of questions and that only a single supplementary question can be asked at the meeting.
- 1.4 However there are some variations in practice which the Committee might wish to consider (either individually or as a package of options) in reviewing the current process. These include:
- (i) Reducing the maximum number of questions which can be asked by a Member at a Council meeting to 1 (plus 1 supplementary).

- (ii) Limiting the total time allowed for questions. This ranges from 10 to 15 minutes for Leader and Cabinet Members in one Council. to 60 minutes in other Councils. The majority of Councils having a time limit have set the limit at 30 minutes from when the first speaker commences their question. Any questions which are not considered in that timescale are responded to in writing by the next meeting of Council.
- (iii) Limiting the number of questions which will be considered by Council at each meeting. The maximum number varies e.g. 3 (Denbighshire); 5 (Rhondda Cynon Taf); 10 (Anglesey). If the number of questions submitted is above the maximum limit, those to be asked are determined by ballot.
- (iv) Newport City Council has a process called “Formal Questions at Any Other Time”. This requires that any questions submitted are responded to within 10 working days and are published on the Council’s website. This has the benefit that Members do not have to wait for a formal Council meeting to have questions asked and responses published. A link to Newport Council’s website is set out below:

[Link to the Questions and Responses Page with Detail of the Process](#)

1.5 The Committee is asked to consider whether there is a need to revise the process for Members’ questions at Council, and if so, whether any of the options set out above in paragraph 1.4 above should be recommended to the Council for adoption.

2. Speaking at Council Meetings.

2.1 In reviewing the Constitutions of other Councils in Wales, it has become apparent that in a number of Councils, when matters are being debated, political groups use nominated speakers to represent the views of that political group at the meeting rather than having numerous speakers from the floor. To implement such a change in Powys would be a radical departure from current practice, and therefore such a change is not being proposed.

2.2 However, the Committee is asked to consider whether there would be a merit in discussing such a process with political Group Leaders on a trial basis, to see if it has impact on for example, the focus and structure of debates in the Chamber, or whether it leads to the identification at an earlier point of possible amendments to propositions before the Council.

2.3 It must be understood that if such a process is used groups will undoubtedly use different spokespersons for different topics, and it will also continue to be the case that individual Members can make their own representations known at a Council meeting.

2.4 The Committee’s views are sought.

RECOMMENDATION	Reason for Recommendation:
(i) that the Committee considers whether to review the process for Members' Questions at Council and to make recommendations to the Council for consideration; (ii) that the Committee indicate its views regarding nominated speakers at Council meetings.	

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