

PROCEDURE FOR QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC AT EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Elaine Woodburn
LEAD OFFICER: Martin Jepson
REPORT AUTHOR: Martin Jepson

WHAT BENEFITS WILL THESE PROPOSALS BRING TO COPELAND RESIDENTS

A facility to ask questions about issues coming before the Executive will give Copeland residents greater involvement in the decision making process.

WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE EXECUTIVE?

(eg Key Decision, Policy recommendation for Full Council, at request of Council,etc.)

The report accompanies the draft procedure proposed to be used for enabling residents to ask questions at meetings of the Executive.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the draft Procedure be considered for approval and that Questions be invited from members of the Public with effect from the Executive's meeting on 21st September.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 24th June 2010 Council approved a revised Constitution. This allowed for questions to be asked at Executive meetings for up to thirty minutes. The procedure for questions to be asked by the public is still to be agreed and a draft proposal is attached.

2. ARGUMENT

2.1 It is recommended that questions are able to be put to the Executive on any item of business to be discussed at that Executive meeting. They should be submitted in writing at least two working days before the meeting. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services should be given the power to reject any

questions which either do not relate to any business at the Executive, which are defamatory, vexatious or frivolous or which are substantially the same as questions which have been answered within the last six months or which require confidential or exempt information to be revealed.

2.2 It is also recommended that the Leader be able to delegate a response to either another member of the Executive or to an officer.

2.3 If any validly submitted and acceptable question cannot be answered verbally within the thirty minute time limit then the questioner shall be given a written reply. Staff would be willing to read questions out if members of the public are unable to do so provided the member of public is present.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The introduction of a procedure for members of the public to ask questions of members of the Executive can only help to make the Council's processes more accessible, can encourage a fresh perspective on Council business and has the potential to renew interest in Council affairs.

4. WHAT ARE THE LEGAL, FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS?

4.1 Some minor but manageable additional work will be required as a result of the new arrangements. It would also marginally increase the length of Executive meetings.

4.2 Monitoring Officer comments:- Is report author.

5. HOW WILL THE PROPOSALS BE PROJECT MANAGED AND HOW ARE THE RISKS GOING TO BE MANAGED?

5.1 The arrangements will be reviewed for effectiveness after six months. Any immediate issues will be addressed by the Leader, Chief Executive and Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

6. WHAT MEASURABLE OUTCOMES OR OUTPUTS WILL ARISE FROM THIS REPORT?

6.1 Generally, this could contribute to an increase in public satisfaction with the Council due to the opportunity given to the public to have a greater involvement in the democratic process.

List of Appendices

- Appendix A Draft procedure for Questions by the Public at Executive meetings.

List of Background Documents: None

Consultees: Corporate Team

DRAFT PROCEDURE FOR QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC AT EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

- 1 A member of the public may ask the Leader, an Executive Member or an officer any question on any matter where the question relates to an item of business to be discussed at the meeting.

Public Question time will be limited to 30 minutes per meeting, provided that the Leader (or Deputy Leader or other Executive member in the Chair if the Leader is absent) shall allow for the question and/or answer which is in progress at the time limit to be completed. The time taken will not be taken into account for the purposes of calculating the 3 hours for other business to be conducted at the meeting.

- 2 Where possible the Head of Legal and Democratic Services will provide a copy of each question to every Member and Chief Officer attending the meeting. Where appropriate Legal and Democratic Services staff will act as scribes.

- 3 All questions should be submitted in writing to the Head of legal and Democratic Services at least two working days before the meeting.

- 4 The Head of Legal & Democratic Services, following consultation with the Chief Executive, may reject a question if it:

(a) Does not relate to an item of business to be discussed at the meeting; or

(b) is defamatory, frivolous or offensive; or

(c) is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Executive in the past six months; or

(d) requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

If the question is to be rejected the Head of Legal and Democratic Services will advise the questioner at the earliest possible opportunity.

- 5 Questions will be asked and answered in the order they are received by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services. The questioner will normally be expected to read out their own question. However, if they do not feel able to do so, a member of staff will read it out on their behalf.

- 6 At any one meeting a questioner may usually ask only one question, which shall be of a length considered reasonable by the Leader, and should be no longer than 3 minutes. A supplementary question to the question asked may be asked and answered at the discretion of the Leader.
- 7 The Leader will invite the questioner to read the written question. If a questioner who has submitted a written question is unable to be present a written reply will be sent to the questioner.
- 8 The Leader of the Council will decide which Executive Member or officer will answer a particular question.
- 9 Any question submitted within the timescale shown at 3. above and which is not rejected for one of the reasons shown at 4. above and which cannot be dealt with during Public Question Time will be dealt with by written answer.

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