



## Democratic Renewal Working Party 24 November 2011

### Full Council: Public Question Time

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 At full Council on 27 September 2011 one member of the public put a total of nine questions, including supplementary questions, to the Council. Some had been submitted in advance but others were without notice.
- 1.2 Concerns have been expressed by some Members that it was not the intention for one member of the public to raise so many questions and the Democratic Renewal Working Party should review this procedure. The current procedure, as detailed in Section 9 of Part 4, Rules of Procedure, of the Council's Constitution, is attached as Appendix A to this Report.
- 1.3 In addition, Councillor Nettleton has submitted a proposed amendment to the Council's Constitution as follows:-

*'Each person shall be allowed to ask one question only plus a supplementary question arising directly from the reply, provided that the total time taken for the question(s) and answer(s) does not exceed five minutes.'*

*'Written questions may be submitted to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services no later than 10.00 am on the morning of the day preceding the meeting. The written notification should detail the full question to be asked and there will be an expectation that such questions are answered directly at the meeting, as due notice has been given.'*

#### 2. Considerations

- 2.1 It has become custom and practice in recent years for the Mayor to encourage that the full 30 minutes set aside for this agenda item at full Council to be fully utilised. Consequently, if questions are put and answered within the 30 minutes the Mayor will ask previous questioners if they have another question.
- 2.2 Appendix B attached lists the key issues in public speaking procedures at full Council operated by other district/borough councils in Suffolk.
- 2.3 The Working Party is requested to consider whether the arrangements for Public Question Time at full Council, and consequently the Council's Constitution, requires amendment.

For further information please contact:-  
Steven Lincoln, Committee Services Manager,  
Telephone: (01284) 757108 or e-mail: [steven.lincoln@stedsbcc.gov.uk](mailto:steven.lincoln@stedsbcc.gov.uk)

## **Extract from Section 9 in Part 4, Rules of Procedure, of the Council's Constitution**

### **9. QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC AND PETITIONS**

#### **Questions**

#### **9.1 General**

9.1.1 Members of the public may ask questions of Members of the Cabinet or any Committee Chairman at ordinary meetings of the Council. 30 minutes will be set aside for persons in the public gallery who are residents of the Borough to ask questions about the work of the Council. 30 minutes will also be set aside for questions at special or extraordinary meetings of the Council, but must be limited to the business to be transacted at that meeting.

9.1.2 Written questions, detailing the full question to be asked, may be submitted by members of the public to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services no later than 10.00 am on the previous working day to the meeting of the Council.

#### **9.2 Order of Questions**

Questions will be asked in the order in which notice of them was received, except that the Mayor may group together similar questions.

#### **9.3 Time Limits**

9.3.1 Each person will be allowed up to a total of five minutes for the question(s) to be put and answered. One further question will be allowed arising directly from the reply, provided that the original time limit of five minutes is not exceeded.

9.3.2 If no questions are received or all the questions are dealt with within the 30 minutes set aside, the Council will move to the next business.

## **Key Issues in Public Speaking Procedures at full Council: Other Local Authorities in Suffolk**

### **1. Babergh District Council**

- 1.1 Members of the public may ask questions of any Chairman of a Committee at ordinary meetings of the Council.
- 1.2 A question may only be asked if notice has been given by delivering it in writing or by electronic mail to the Director of Corporate Services no later than midday two working days before the day of the meeting.
- 1.3 At any one meeting no person may submit more than one question (plus a supplementary question) and no more than one question (plus a supplementary question) may be asked on behalf of one organisation.
- 1.4 The Chairman will invite the questioner to put the question to the Member named in the notice. A questioner who has put a question in person may also put one supplementary question without notice to the Member who has replied to his or her original question.

### **2. Forest Heath District Council**

- 2.1 Members of the public are invited to put questions/statements of not more than three minutes duration relating to items to be discussed in the public part of the agenda at meetings of the Council. The three minutes may be extended at the sole discretion of the Chairman of the Council.
- 2.2 Speakers may speak on more than one item on the agenda and may ask a supplementary question or make a further comment on an item at the discretion of the Chairman (subject to the three minute rule mentioned in paragraph 2.1 above).
- 2.3 The Chairman has discretion to limit the number of speakers and the time taken for questions/statements if it appears that time wasting and/or repetition is taking place or where there are a large number of people wanting to speak.

### **3. Ipswich Borough Council**

- 3.1 Members of the public are permitted to ask a maximum of two questions per meeting and one supplementary question per main question. Supplementary questions must relate to the subject matter of the original question and must not be preceded by a statement.
- 3.2 Questions must be submitted to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services no later than 10.00 am two working days before the meeting.
- 3.3 Questions must be in writing or emailed.
- 3.4 Public Question time is limited to a total of 30 minutes.

#### **4. Mid Suffolk District Council**

- 4.1 The Council has agreed that, at the beginning of each meeting of the full Council a maximum of half an hour will be set aside to allow members of the public (by prior arrangement) to ask a question or make a statement.
- 4.2 Prior notice must be given to the District Monitoring Officer no later than 5.00 pm one day before the meeting.
- 4.3 At the meeting each question or statement will be restricted to a maximum of two minutes.
- 4.4 Each speaker will be allowed one supplementary question or statement provided this is directly related to the issue they have raised in their original question or statement.

#### **5. Suffolk Coastal District Council**

- 5.1 There is no public question time at full Council.

#### **6. Waveney District Council**

- 6.1 A question may be asked if notice has been given by delivering it in writing or by electronic mail to the proper officer no later than midday ten working days before the day of the meeting. Questions which are not rejected will appear on the agenda for the meeting.
- 6.2 Questions will not normally be read out at the meeting. The Chairman may, at their discretion, allow a questioner present at the meeting to read out their question.
- 6.3 A maximum of three minutes shall be allowed for any question that is read out and the public question session will last no longer than 30 minutes.