

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE – 21 May 2008

Standing Orders as to Meetings

1. The Council's Standing Orders as to meetings requires notice to be given of questions of the Mayor or Town Clerk. Those Standing Orders provide for written notice to be given seven working days before a meeting, determine the number of questions that any Councillor can ask and provides for a maximum length of each question. The Standing Orders were introduced in order to improve the efficiency of Council meetings and make sure that the items on questions to the Mayor could not be used for personal or political propaganda purposes. Prior to the adoption of these Standing Orders, questions of the Mayor had become the major cause of long and extended meetings of the Council.
2. It has now been suggested that the Standing Orders should be changed to enable questions to be put without notice or with very much shorter notice than is provided for within the Standing Orders. This has arisen because questions were raised at the Annual Council Meeting of which notice had not been given.
3. Whilst it is perfectly reasonable to reconsider the issue, it is essential to retain some structure to Council meetings. The current arrangements allow for members to ask Committee Chairman questions on any matter arising from Minutes presented to the Council meeting without notice. Notice is only required when new issues are to be raised under the Questions of the Mayor item.
4. Prior to the introduction of the new arrangements, questions were raised and the Mayor had no opportunity to research answers. The result was that the questions were reported in full in the press and gave the wrong impression of the work undertaken by the Town Council. It would be a backward step to return to those arrangements. Where short notice of questions was given, officers had to suspend other programmed work in order to provide the Mayor with relevant information to enable him to respond.
5. Whilst it is suggested that there should be no change in Standing Orders at this stage, members are reminded that Standing Order No. 67 does allow the suspension of Standing Orders. This means that if a member has a particular question that he or she would wish to raise, then this can be done with the consent of the Mayor and the meeting, although such request should be raised with the Mayor and Town Clerk before the commencement of the meeting.
6. It is recommended that, in order to maintain the effective administration of the Council, no changes be made to Standing Order at the present time.

FOR ANY FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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TRS/sg 14 May 2008