

## QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC – TIME LIMITATION

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes the introduction of a time limitation with regard to the length of questions from the public at meetings of Council.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The last round of Members' competency training included a session on the application of rules of procedure to meetings. During discussion of the facility available for the public to ask questions at Council meetings a number of Members felt that, to facilitate business throughput, there could be merit in introducing a maximum time element for the length of questions.

### 3 DISCUSSION

- 3.1 The rule of procedure relating to questions by the public is set out on pages 4.5 and 4.6 of the Council's Constitution (Procedure Rule 10). The mechanism is prescribed, but is silent on the length of questions that can be asked.
- 3.2 Whilst Council has yet to experience a situation where a question cannot be dealt with because of lack of time, the introduction of a time limit would reduce the likelihood of such an occurrence. A time limit could also bring further focus to the process.
- 3.3 Contact has been made with a number of other Essex authorities to ascertain the approach taken by others. Some authorities have no time limits. Others set a maximum total time for the questions period. For example, 30 or 40 minutes. Where a time limit per question has been introduced, the limit is either up to 2 or 3 minutes. One authority provides that a bell be rung two thirds of the way through delivery of a question to alert the questioner to the time remaining. Whilst it is unlikely that supplementary questions would be lengthy, it might be appropriate to introduce a time frame of, say, 1 minute for a supplementary question.

### 4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Committee:-
- (1) **RECOMMENDS** to Council that the procedure rule relating to questions by the public is changed to provide for a time limit of up to 3 minutes for each question and 1 minute for each supplemental question, the following wording to be added to Council Procedure Rule 10.1:-

"The maximum time limit for asking each question is 3 minutes. The maximum time limit for a supplemental question is 1 minute."

- (2) Considers whether the time allowed for questions should be specified as not exceeding, say, 30 minutes, subject to the Council consenting to an extension (provision for this aspect could also be added to procedure rule 10.1).

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**Background Papers:**

None

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