

Council

22 January 2026

Review of the Constitution – Questions at Cabinet and Full Council Meetings

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Vince Maple, Leader of the Council

Report from: Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director Legal and Governance

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Summary

This report sets out a review of the recent trial of public and Member questions at Cabinet meetings and seeks to make these changes permanent by amending the Constitution as necessary.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Council is asked to approve the changes to the Council Rules as set out in Appendix A to the report, regarding the arrangements for public and Member questions at full Council meetings.
- 1.2. The Council is asked to approve the changes to the Leader and Cabinet Rules as set out in Appendix B to the report, regarding the arrangements for public and Member questions at Cabinet meetings.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. The proposed changes to the Constitution set out in the report are a matter for decision by the Council.
- 2.2. Paragraph 16.2 of the Council Rules states that “Any motion to add to, change or withdraw these Council Rules will, when proposed and seconded, be taken forward without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council.” It is considered that the Council has complied with this requirement by bringing forward proposals to the full Council meetings on 23 January 2025 and 24 April 2025 regarding the trial of public and Member questions at Cabinet meetings. In addition, it is considered that the changes to the Council Rules are minor, making clear that only questions relating to non-executive

functions will be taken at full Council meetings, with questions relating to Cabinet agenda items or executive functions being referred to Cabinet.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Constitution is reviewed and updated on an on-going basis to ensure it remains fit for purpose including compliance with legislation, in accordance with Article 14 of the Council's Constitution.
- 3.2. The matter of how Council meetings are conducted continues to be kept under review by Group Leaders and at the Cross Party Governance meetings, with any proposals being reported to full Council for consideration.
- 3.3. As reported to full Council on 23 January 2025 and 24 April 2025, following initial discussion at the Cross Party Governance meeting on 22 November 2024 and the Group Leaders' meeting on 10 January 2025, it was agreed that proposed changes to the arrangements for dealing with public and Member questions be trialled for six months starting from the beginning of the 2025/2026 municipal year.
- 3.4. Members were advised that given that most questions relate to Cabinet (executive) functions, any public or Member questions which were submitted would be reviewed by the Head of Democratic Services and Assistant Director, Legal and Governance and any questions relating to Cabinet functions, would be referred to the next Cabinet meeting, any other questions would be referred to the next full Council meeting in accordance with the submission deadlines which were in place at the time.
- 3.5. For any questions dealt with by the Cabinet, the same rules would apply as set out in the Council Rules, e.g. public questioners would be able to ask a short supplementary question. With regards to inclusion of questions on Cabinet agendas, such questions received no later than Midday, three working days before the meeting (e.g. noon on the Thursday prior to a meeting held on a Tuesday) would be included, otherwise they would be included on the following Cabinet meeting agenda. A period of 20 minutes was set aside for questions at Cabinet meetings and first-time questioners and questions relating to items on the Cabinet Agenda were prioritised.
- 3.6. Therefore, public and Member questions were included on Cabinet agendas from June 2025, in relation to Cabinet agenda items or other matters which fell under the responsibility of the Cabinet, i.e. executive functions, with questions on other matters, i.e. non-executive functions, being submitted to full Council.
- 3.7. Members were advised that key benefits of this would include the increased frequency and timeliness to hold the executive to account, greater time set aside for accountability (up to an additional 260 minutes (Cabinet meetings) compared with the existing 240 minutes (full Council meetings) when annualised), and the ability for the public and Members to put questions to Cabinet Members on matters on the Cabinet Agenda for which both members

of the public and Members have access to the Cabinet's Forward Plan which is published on the website. The Forward Plan sets out the reports proposed to be considered by the Cabinet on a four month rolling basis, and this will aid those who wish to submit questions to the Cabinet.

- 3.8. As part of this and during the trial period, views of public questioners were sought to help inform any proposals to make these changes permanent, via a short survey available on the Council's website which ran from August – January 2026.
- 3.9. Members were advised at the Cross Party Governance meeting held on 9 December 2025 of the proposal to submit a report to this full Council meeting to make these trialled changes permanent.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. Since the trial started in June 2025, summary information is set out below regarding the numbers of questions submitted to Cabinet and full Council meetings.

Cabinet meetings June 2025 – December 2025

Date/Question type	Public – Agenda related	Member – Agenda related	Public – Cabinet related	Member – Cabinet related
3 June 2025	0	0	3	0
8 July 2025	0	1	2	4
29 July 2025	1	0	2	4
26 August 2025	1	0	1	2
23 September 2025	0	13	1	0
21 October 2025	0	0	4	1
18 November 2025	3	0	3	1
16 December 2025	1	0	4	6
Total	6	14	20	18

Full Council meetings June 2024 – December 2024 and June 2025 – December 2025

Date/Question type	Public	Member
July 2024	6	16
October 2024	12	10
Total	18	26
July 2025	2	13
October 2025	3	3
Total	5	16

- 4.2. The above information indicates that 79 public and Member questions were submitted to either full Council or Cabinet meetings for the period June 2025-December 2025, compared with 44 public and Member questions for the equivalent period in 2024.
- 4.3. For the reasons set out when these proposals were originally put forward, which in summary relates to a greater amount of time for which public and Member questions can be taken at full Council and Cabinet meetings, it is recommended that these changes now be made permanent.
- 4.4. Whilst the recommended changes to the Council Rules are minor, to specify that only questions relating to non-executive functions will be taken at full Council meetings, as set out in Appendix A to the report, the Leader and Cabinet Rules have been amended to facilitate questions at Cabinet meetings, to ensure that the arrangements to be put in place are clear to understand, as set out in Appendix B to the report.

5. Consultation

- 5.1. Members have previously been consulted on the proposed changes as detailed in the report.
- 5.2. As indicated in section 3 of the report, a short survey was available on the website from mid August 2025 to the beginning of January 2026, with information available publicising the survey at meetings. Whilst only two responses were received, both responses indicated that questions at Cabinet meetings should be made permanent.

6. Financial, legal and risk management implications

- 6.1. There are no financial management implications arising from this report.
- 6.2. Section 9P of the Local Government Act 2000 (“the 2000 Act”) requires a local authority to prepare and keep up to date a Constitution which contains a copy of the Council’s standing orders, a copy of the Council’s Code of Conduct, such information as the Secretary of State may direct and such other information as the Council considers appropriate. The Constitution must also

include certain mandatory standing orders with respect to staff and the regulation of specified aspects of the proceedings and business of the Council.

- 6.3. Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. Article 14 of the Council's Constitution places an obligation on the Monitoring Officer to monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure that its aims and principles are given full effect. It is important that this is done on an ongoing and regular basis to minimise the risk of the Council failing to operate its governance arrangements in line with current legislation and best practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Council Rules
Appendix B – Leader and Cabinet Rules

Background papers

None