

## **REPORT OF EXECUTIVE CABINET**

### **PUBLIC QUESTIONS/SPEAKING AT COUNCIL/COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

1. The Executive Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive at its meeting on 24 August 2006 which put forward proposals to allow the public to speak and/or ask questions at meetings of the Council, Executive Cabinet, Development Control Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny bodies within defined criteria.
2. The proposals have evolved from the research work undertaken by the former Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel as part of its scrutiny inquiry into public participation in the Council's decision making process. The plans to allow public speaking at Development Control Committees have, in fact, been supported by the Committee, subject to the preparation and implementation of appropriate procedure rules.
3. A copy of the Chief Executive's report which sets out in more detail the background and implications of the proposals is attached for information.
4. The Executive Cabinet supports the plans to improve the level of public participation in the Council's democratic decision making processes and commends the following recommendations to the Council. We accept that there will be a number of issues, particularly in terms of the suitability of meeting rooms and the possible need for public address/loop systems, that will need to be addressed if the proposals are implemented.
5. A report on the provision of a PA/loop system in the Council Chamber/Committee Room in the Town Hall to meet disability discrimination requirements will be submitted to the Executive Cabinet on 9 November for consideration.
6. The proposals were submitted to the Council meeting held on 19 September 2006 and in accordance with Paragraph 27.2 of the Council Procedure Rules, the recommendation was adjourned without further discussion to the next Ordinary Council meeting to be held on 31 October 2006.

### **Recommendations**

7. The Council is recommended to give approval to the introduction of a regulated scheme for public speaking at meetings of the Council, Executive Cabinet, Development Control Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny bodies in accordance with the criteria set out below and, accordingly, to authorise the addition of the following text to the Council Procedure Rules, as set out in Part A of Appendix 3 of the Council's Constitution:

#### **'PUBLIC QUESTIONS/SPEAKING**

##### **1) Council and Executive Cabinet Meetings**

- A maximum period of three minutes will be allowed for a question from a member of the public on an item on the agenda. A maximum period of 30 minutes to be allocated for public questions if necessary at each ordinary Council meeting (ie excluding the Annual Meeting).
- Questions should be submitted to the Democratic Services Section by midday, two working days prior to each Council meeting to allow time to prepare appropriate responses and investigate the issue if necessary.
- The question to be answered by the Executive Member with responsibility for the service area or whoever is most appropriate.
- On receiving a reply the member of the public will be allowed to ask one supplementary question.

- Members of the public will be able to stay for the rest of the meeting should they so wish but will not be able to speak on any other agenda item upon using their allocated three minutes.

2) Development Control Committee

- One person to be allowed to address the Committee in favour of the officers recommendations on respective planning applications and one person to be allowed to speak against the officer's recommendations.
- Persons must give notice of their wish to address the Committee to the Democratic Services Section by no later than midday, two working days before the day of the meeting.
- In the event of several people wishing to speak either in favour or against the recommendation, the respective group(s) be requested to select one spokesperson to address the Committee.
- If a person wishes to speak either in favour or against an application without anyone wishing to present an opposing argument that person be allowed to address the Committee.
- Each person/group addressing the Committee be allowed a maximum of three minutes to speak.
- The Committee debate and consideration of the planning applications awaiting decision will only commence after all of the public addresses.

(3) Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Panels

- A maximum period of three minutes will be allowed for a question from a member of the public on an item on the agenda. A maximum period of 30 minutes to be allowed for public questions if necessary at each meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its appropriate panels. This will provide an opportunity for members of the public to raise and ask questions on any issue falling within the remit of the Committee or Panel.
- Questions must be submitted to the Democratic Services Section by no later than midday, two working days before the day of the meeting to allow time to prepare appropriate responses and investigate issues if necessary. ' ”

COUNCILLOR J WALKER

Executive Member for Customer, Democratic and Legal Services

There are no background papers to this report.

AU