

# Executive Summary and Recommendations

**Title of Report:** Council Meetings

**Date:** 15 January 2009

## **Summary of this Report**

This report is submitted to meet the Leader of the Council's wish to make Council Meetings more effective and forward looking. The proposals are the result of discussion and consultation between the Chief Whip of the Majority Party, the Chief Whip of the Minority Party and officers. It is intended to simplify the format of Council meetings and make the debates more relevant to the future direction of the Council

## **Recommendations**

1. That the Council be recommended to agree the changes to its meetings as outlined in this report.
2. That the Council be recommended to approve the changes to Standing Orders set out in Appendix A.
3. That the changes be implemented so that they take effect after the Council meeting on 28 January 2009 and reviewed by the General Purposes Committee after 6 months.



City of Westminster

# Committee Report

Item No:	
Date:	15 January 2009
Classification:	For General Release
Title of Report:	Council Meetings
Report of:	Head of Administrative Services
Wards involved:	None
Policy context:	Business like approach
Financial summary:	There are no financial implications
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### **3. Background Information**

- 3.1 The Chief Whip is proposing a number of changes to the format of full Council meetings to make them more relevant, in particular to the future policy direction of the Council, instead of as now primarily debating decisions already taken. The Chief Whip of the Minority Party has been consulted.

The changes proposed are set out below (other Council meeting procedures remain unchanged)

#### **(a) Questions**

- (i) The current draw and published list of questioners will be kept, but the Leader of the Opposition would be entitled to ask 3 questions during the meeting (instead of the current maximum of 2).
- (ii) Question time to be increased to 45 minutes (from the current 30 minutes).
- (iii) The transcript of Questions and Answers will be placed on the Council's website and circulated to all Members no later than 21 days after the meeting.

#### **(b) Debates**

- (i) The current arrangement of the Council agenda including formal reports of all Cabinet, Cabinet Committees, individual Cabinet Member decisions, Policy and Scrutiny Committees and other relevant Committee decisions would be abolished. These decisions are already outlined in the Weekly Information Bulletin issued to all Members. The Minutes of these meetings are already placed on the Council's website shortly after each meeting. The formal reporting of these meetings to Council duplicates existing documents published elsewhere. The Council will still consider recommendations from the relevant body, where the matter is reserved for the full Council to decide, for example, setting the Council Tax and constitutional changes.
- (ii) The current system also acts mainly as an opportunity to debate decisions which have already been taken or have been the subject of scrutiny at one of the Council's Policy and Scrutiny Committees. Only Notices of Motion and the annual Leader's Speech currently tend to focus on a general debate of policy matters. These proposals are intended to address this deficiency.

- (iii) The officers will produce and keep up-to-date a Future Policy Plan containing emerging issues that may or will require future policy decisions. This plan will include all issues emerging from the annual Leader's Speech and from national plans/White Papers or from other sources. This will be published and circulated to Members approximately 3 weeks prior to each ordinary Council meeting and form part of the Council agenda.
- (iv) In future it is proposed that the two Party Groups select the subject areas chosen for debate from the new Future Policy Plan as well as from the new format Council agenda. The current timetable for the selection of items for debate will remain unchanged (except notification will be by 10 am (instead of by noon) on the Thursday prior to the Council Meeting).
- (v) Where an issue has been selected for debate from the Future Policy Plan, the relevant Chief Officer will be responsible for preparing a short briefing paper to assist Members in these debates. Such briefing papers are to be circulated at least 5 days before the meeting. These briefing papers will also be available to the public in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act.
- (vi) It is proposed to increase the time for speeches to 5 minutes (from the current 4 minutes). Generally, it is anticipated that there will be 3 debates (2 chosen by the Majority Party and one by the Minority Party).
- (vii) It is also proposed that the length of Council meetings be kept to the current 3 hours. An outline programme for the revised format Council meeting (with approximate timings) is set out below:

7pm	Opening of meeting, Lord Mayor's Communications and receipt of Petitions and Deputations, Statement on Urgent business
7.05 pm	Questions
7.50 pm	Councillor Issues
8.10 pm	Items selected for debate: Majority Party 80 minutes and Minority Party 30 minutes
10 00pm	Voting on items on which a decision of the Council is required followed by close of meeting

- 3.2 The public plain English guide to Council meetings will be revised to reflect the changes, circulated to members and published on the City Council's website.

- 3.3 Guidance will be issued to Chief Officers setting out the requirement to keep the Future Policy Plan of policy decisions up-to-date and to produce the briefing notes for items selected for debate at Council.
- 3.4 There are consequential changes to the Council's Standing Orders as a result of the changes outlined above. These are set out in detail in Appendix A for adoption by the Council.

#### **4. Legal Implications**

- 4.1 The Council is required to hold an annual meeting and such other meetings as they may determine during the course of the year. The summons (agenda) of the meeting is required to specify the business to be transacted at the meeting. Currently the items for debate are selected from amongst the items on the published agenda. As this will now include the Future Policy Plan as part of the Council agenda, the political parties will continue to be able to select their issues for debate to the current timetable.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### **6. Staffing Implications**

A review of the work of the Cabinet, Committee and Scrutiny Secretariat is being undertaken. The changes outlined in this report will be taken into account as part of that review.

#### **7. Other Implications – None.**

If you have any questions about this report please contact  
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STANDING ORDERS  
(New wording in bold)

3. **Ordinary Meetings**

- (g) have a **45** minute period for questions. (Note – instead of 30 minutes)
- (l) consider the reports and any recommendations of the Cabinet, Cabinet Committees, individual Cabinet Members and non-executive Committees
- (m) **consider issues from the Future Policy Plan notified by the Chief Whips of the political parties in accordance with Standing Order 11.**

9. **Questions**

(a) Oral Questions

- (1) At ordinary Council meetings all Members of the Council (except the Lord Mayor, **Relief Chairman** and Cabinet Members) shall be entitled to ask a question at a meeting, except for the Leader of the Opposition who is entitled to ask **up to 3 questions during the meeting.**
- (8) Question time shall be **45** minutes and then the Chairman will end question time and any member speaking at the time will sit down. The Chairman may allow an extension of time to permit a reply to be made to the last question called or put.

**(Standing Order 11 in its present form to be deleted and replaced by the following)**

11. **Agenda Items for Debate and Decision**

- (1) All reports of the Cabinet, Committees or from Officers shall where practicable be sent to each member with the notice convening the meeting of the Council at which they will be considered. **The Head of Legal Services will also at least 3 weeks prior to the meeting have circulated to all councillors a Future Policy Plan to assist members in selecting items for debate.**
- (2) **The Cabinet, Cabinet Committees, individual Cabinet Members and relevant Committees shall, if making a recommendation for a decision, submit a written report including such a recommendation to the Council.**
- (3) A nominated representative of each of the two largest political groups on the Council shall, no later than **10 am** on the sixth day before the Council Meeting (usually the preceding Thursday) notify the Head of Legal Services of the Group's choice and preferred order of items for debate from amongst the

Cabinet and Committee Reports, **Future Policy Plan** and any Notices of Motion under Standing Order 13.

- (4) The Head of Legal Services shall draw up two lists identifying the items selected by the groups and the order selected.
- (5) The Head of Legal Services shall circulate these lists to all Councillors by no later than the fifth day prior to the Council Meeting (usually the preceding Friday) **together with a Briefing Note on each item selected for debate from the Future Policy Plan prepared by the appropriate Chief Officer.**
- (6) A Cabinet Member or a Committee Chairman (or nominee) may correct errors in any paragraph in any part of a report or recommendation, or with the consent of the Council withdraw any report or recommendation.
- (7) Up to the first one hour **twenty** (Note: instead of one hour forty-five) minutes shall be allocated to the agenda items selected for debate by the Majority Party and up to **thirty** (Note: instead of twenty-five) minutes on items selected by the Minority Group. In the event that there is less than 1 hour 50 minutes available prior to 10pm the Chairman will reduce the debating time proportionately.
- (8) When reached in accordance with the preferred priority order of debate, each paragraph with a recommendation will be deemed to have been moved and seconded. The Cabinet Member or the Committee Chairman (or nominee) may speak first and may nominate another Member to exercise his right of reply to the debate.
- (9) Any item containing a recommendation may, subject to Standing Order 12 (3) and (4), be the subject of comment or a motion to amend the recommendation or of a motion that the recommendation be referred back to the Cabinet or a Committee. No other motion affecting such an item shall be moved.
- (10) A member moving that a recommendation be referred back to the Cabinet or a Committee or moving an amendment to a recommendation shall not have the right of reply. Such right shall be available only to the member moving the reception of the report or his nominee and upon the exercise of that right the debate on the reference back or the amendment then under discussion shall be closed.
- (11) Any member may comment In respect of any issue selected for debate that does not include a recommendation, **including any issue from the Future Policy Plan**, but neither a motion nor an amendment to it shall be permitted.
- (12) Subject to (13) (14) and (15) below, after the first **1 hour 15 minutes** of debate on Majority Party items has expired, the Chairman shall call the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chairman (or nominee) to respond to the debate on the paragraph then under debate. Debate will then continue on the Minority Group item(s). The same procedure shall be adopted after the next **25** minutes of debate on Minority Party items. The Chairman will

terminate the meeting under Standing Order 19 on the conclusion of Minority Party business.

- (13) If the Majority Group and the Minority Group both select the same item for debate and the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chairman has been called to respond on that item during the time allocated to the Majority Group, then the debate on that item shall thereafter be regarded as concluded and the item will not be called again during the time allocated to the Minority Group. In the event that the last item being debated in the time allocated to the Majority Group is also the first item selected by the Minority Group then the debate will be allowed to continue into the time allocated to the Minority Group and the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chairman will be called to respond at the conclusion of the debate on that item or after **25** minutes of the Minority Group time as appropriate, rather than after **1 hour 15** minutes of Majority Group time.
- (14) If a Cabinet Member or a Committee Chairman or his nominee is making the first speech **on an item selected for debate when 1 hour 15 minutes** has elapsed then the Chairman may treat that speech as the last speech.
- (15) Any matter formally referred to the Council for debate by a Policy and Scrutiny Committee shall have priority for debate and the time spent shall be deducted in the relevant proportions from the time allocated to Majority/Minority Group business.
- (16) On the conclusion of other items on the agenda (if any) the Chairman shall then call, in the order appearing on the agenda the remaining paragraphs not yet debated in any report which include recommendations and when called the recommendations in any paragraph shall be deemed to have been moved and seconded.

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