
TO REVIEW COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 2.0 IN RELATION TO BUSINESS CONSIDERED AT BUDGET-SETTING MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

To: Council – 24 April 2014

By: Democratic Services & Scrutiny Manager

Classification: Unrestricted

Ward: Not applicable

Summary: To review Council Procedure Rule 2.0 in relation to business transacted at budget-setting meetings of Council

For Decision

1.0 The Current Situation

- 1.1 As from 2012, the Council has held an additional meeting, either in late January or early February, for the purpose of setting the budget. In 2012, this was an extraordinary meeting. In 2013 and 2014, it was an ordinary meeting and on that basis, the usual items of business transacted at ordinary meetings were placed on the agenda; for example:
- Announcements
 - Petitions from the public
 - Questions from the press and public
 - Motions on notice
 - Leader's Report
- 1.2 Prior to the budget meeting taking place on 6 February 2014, the Political Group Leaders reached an informal agreement whereby Members did not submit questions or notices of motion to the meeting, given that they could be submitted to a different Council meeting only a few weeks later (on 27 February). The underlying purpose of that arrangement was to enable more time to be devoted to consideration of the budget at the meeting. Additionally, and for the same reason, the Leader of Council declined to present the Leader's report.
- 1.3 In a similar vein, a question was received from a member of the public that would ordinarily have been presented to the meeting on the 6th. The member of the public was asked if they were willing to defer the question until the meeting on 27 February, which they agreed to.
- 1.4 At a recent meeting involving all Group Leaders, they seemed to wish to formally restrict the number of agenda items that could be considered at the budget setting meeting, for the same reason – allowing maximum time for a debate on budget setting for the year ahead.
- 1.5 As the budget-setting meeting is essentially an “extra meeting”, followed by a further ordinary meeting (at which the council tax is agreed) three to four weeks later, it is not considered that the opportunities for transaction of other ordinary business (which do

not relate to the budget) are significantly affected by excluding that business from the agenda.

- 1.6 Online research has been carried out with a view to determining whether any other councils exclude non-budget business from their budget setting meetings. Table 1 provides some examples of items of business that are not permissible.

Table 1

Council	Items excluded from a budget setting meeting of council
Birmingham	Public questions
Cardiff	Members' questions Members' notices of motion
Lambeth	Members' questions Reports from Cabinet and other council committees Members' motions
Norfolk	Everything "... except the budget and associated items, subject to the Chairman having discretion to accept additional items other than those relating to the budget; but only in exceptional or urgent circumstances."
Medway	Petitions Public questions Leader's report Report on Overview & Scrutiny activity Members' questions Members' motions

- 1.7 Members may wish to note that in the case of Birmingham and Cardiff, council meetings are generally held on a monthly basis; in the case of Norfolk, an ordinary meeting takes place a month before and a month after the budget meeting; in the case of Lambeth an ordinary meeting takes place a month before and 6-7 weeks after the budget meeting; and, finally, in the case of Medway, an ordinary meeting takes place a month before and 2 months after the budget meeting.

2.0 Options

- 2.1 **Option 1** - exclude from the budget-setting meeting agendas all items that do not relate to the budget, with the exception of the essential items of apologies for absence, minutes of previous meeting and declarations of interests, subject to a qualification similar to that used by Norfolk council as follows:

- *subject to the Chairman having discretion to accept additional items; but only in exceptional or urgent circumstances.*

- 2.2 **Option 2** - only exclude from the budget-setting meeting agendas some or all of the items of business listed at paragraph 1.1 above, but also with the qualification above regarding exceptional or urgent items;

2.3 **Option 3** - do not exclude any items of business from the budget-setting meeting agenda.

2.4 How the adoption of options at paragraphs 2.1 or 2.2 could affect the wording of Council Procedure Rule 2.0 is illustrated at Annex 1.

3.0 Recommendation of the Standards Committee

3.1 At its meeting held on 1 April 2014, Standards Committee AGREED TO RECOMMEND to Council:

3.1.1 THAT Option 1 be adopted;

3.1.2 THAT the suggested amendment to Council Procedure Rule 2.0 to take account of that option, as set out at Annex 1 to the report, be approved.

4.0 Corporate Implications

4.1 Financial and VAT

4.1.1 None

4.2 Legal

4.2.1 Any changes to the types of business transacted at ordinary budget meetings must be reflected in the Council's constitution.

4.3 Corporate

4.3.1 Whereas it could be considered that the opportunity afforded to members of the public to participate in council meetings would be diminished by the exclusion of public petitions and questions from the agenda of an ordinary budget setting meeting, this must be weighed against the close proximity that now exists between the ordinary budget setting meeting and the ordinary Council meeting that follows it.

4.4 Equity and Equalities

4.4.1 None arising directly from this report.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 THAT, following the recommendation of Standards Committee, Option 1 be adopted, namely, to exclude from the budget-setting meeting agendas all items that do not relate to the budget, with the exception of the essential items of apologies for absence, minutes of previous meeting and declarations of interests, subject to a qualification as follows:

- *subject to the Chairman having discretion to accept additional items; but only in exceptional or urgent circumstances*

5.2 THAT the suggested amendment to Council Procedure Rule 2.0 to take account of option 1, as set out at Annex 1, be approved.

6.0 Decision Making Process

6.1 This is a decision for Council to take.

Contact Officer:	Glenn Back, Democratic Services & Scrutiny Manager, ext 7187
Reporting to:	Harvey Patterson, Corporate & Regulatory Services Manager and Monitoring Officer, ext 7005

Annex List

Annex 1	Suggested changes to CPR 2.0 to take account of Options 1 & 2
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Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
<i>None</i>	

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	<i>n/a</i>
Legal	<i>Harvey Patterson, Corporate & Regulatory Services Manager and Monitoring Officer, Ext 7005</i>