

FULL COUNCIL QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

Meeting	Council 10 December 2020
Previously Considered by	Constitutional Review Working Party - 5 November 2020 Standards Committee - 19 November 2020
Report Author	Nicholas Hughes, Committee Services Manager
Portfolio Holder	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Services
Status	For Recommendation
Classification:	Unrestricted

Executive Summary:

The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council asked Democratic Services to review the 50 word limit for Council questions submitted by both members of the public and Councillors with a view to increasing it. Democratic Services have undertaken that review comparing the TDC scheme with others in Kent. As a result Democratic Services are proposing an increase to the word limit for both questions from both members of the public and Councillors to 150 words.

Recommendation(s):

To consider the the following recommendation from the Standards Committee:

“The Standards Committee recommends to the Full Council to increase the word limit for Full Council questions from Members of the Public and Councillors from 50 words to 150 words.”

Corporate Implications

Financial and Value for Money

There are no financial implications to the report.

Legal

The rules surrounding asking questions at Full Council meetings are contained in the Council’s constitution. Any substantial changes to the constitution should be brought to the Constitutional Review Working Party and the Standards Committee prior to be agreed upon at a meeting of the Full Council.

Corporate

Asking questions to the Council's Executive is a fundamental part of the Council's democratic process and a major way of Councillors and members of the public holding them to account.

Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.

This report relates to the following aim of the equality duty: -

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- To foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -

- Communities

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 The Deputy Leader and the Leader of the Council approached Democratic Services to ask for a review of the word limit for questions at Full Council submitted by members of the public and Councillors.

2.0 The Current Situation

2.1 The current word limit for questions to Full Council from members of the public and Councillors is currently 50 words. Democratic Services compared our questions scheme with other Council's across Kent. This research indicated that a 50 word limit was significantly less than the vast majority of other Council's in Kent.

2.2 Democratic Services carried out a small experiment regarding the word limits. A 50 word question takes approximately 20 seconds to present, a 150 word question takes approximately 60 seconds to present. This extension of the word limit will allow for

more background and for fuller and rounder questions, without the temptation to enter into political speeches, which is not the point of the question facility.

- 2.3 As such Democratic Services feel that an increase from 50 words to 150 words per question is the most appropriate increase, allowing for fuller questions, but still allowing for a significant number of questions within the respective 30 minute time limits.
- 2.4 An amended copy of the relevant section of the constitution is attached to this report at Annex 1.

3.0 Consideration by the Constitutional Review Working Party and the Standards Committee

- 3.1 When this report was considered by the Constitutional review Working party at its meeting on the 5 November, supported the report and the working party made the following recommendation:

“The Constitutional Review Working Party recommends to the Standards Committee to increase the word limit for Full Council questions from Members of the Public and Councillors from 50 words to 150 words.”

- 3.2 When the report was considered by the Standards Committee at its meeting of the 19 November, the Committee supported the report and made the following recommendation to the Full Council.

“The Standards Committee recommends to the Full Council to increase the word limit for Full Council questions from Members of the Public and Councillors from 50 words to 150 words.”

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Full Council can agree the recommendation from the Standards Committee, choose to keep the word limit the same as it currently is or choose to make different amendments to this section of the constitution.

Contact Officer: Nicholas Hughes, Committee Services Manager
Reporting to: Estelle Culligan, Director of Legal and Governance

Annex List

Annex 1: Amended extract of the Constitution.

Background Papers

None

Corporate Consultation

Finance: Matthew Sanham, Financial Services Manager

Legal: Tim Howes, Director of Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer