

TIMINGS OF INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS OF A COUNCIL MEETING

Council	10 October 2024
By	Ingrid Brown, Head of Legal and Democracy and Monitoring Officer
Cabinet Portfolio	Cllr Rob Yates, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Key Decision	No
Decision classification	Unrestricted
Ward:	All Wards

Purpose of the Report

The report is to allow the Full Council to consider the current timings for the individual elements of a Council meeting to see if there is a need to amend any of the individual timings.

Recommendation(s):

The Constitutional Review Committee proposed to Full Council the following recommendations, that:

The time limit for discussion of Motions be changed from 30 minutes to 60 minutes for a trial period of 6 months after which this provision would be brought back to the Committee for review before making a final decision.

1. Summary of Reasons

- 1.1 The subject of the report featured as an item within the Constitutional Review Committee work plan as it was highlighted by the Committee as a subject they wanted to review and if any substantial proposal came out this piece of work would then be forwarded to Full Council.

2. Background

- 2.1 The current times for the individual sections of the meeting that have time limits are as follows:

Table 1

Element	Time Limit
Motions	30 Minutes
Questions from the Press and Public	30 Minutes
Questions from Councillors	30 Minutes

Leaders Speech	10 Minute Speech with 5 minute replies
Petitions	30 Minutes

2.2 These time limits have been in place since the last major review of the Constitution.

3. Relevant Issues

3.1 Democratic Services have undertaken desktop research to understand what other Councils do with regard to the timings of their meetings. The results for Motions and questions are set out below:

Table 2

Council	Motions Allotted Time	Questions. from Public Allotted Time	Questions from Councillors Allotted Time
Ashford BC	No time limit	No time limit	No time limit
Canterbury CC	No time limit	30 Minutes	30 Minutes
Dartford BC	No time limit	No questions allowed	20 Minutes
Dover DC	No time limit	15 Minutes	60 Minutes
Folkestone and Hythe DC	60 Minutes	30 Minutes	45 Minutes
Gravesham BC	No time limit	30 Minutes	30 Minutes
Maidstone BC	No time limit	60 Minutes	30 Minutes
Sevenoaks DC	60 Minutes	No time limit	No time limit
Swale BC	30 Minutes	30 Minutes	30 Minutes
Thanet DC	30 Minutes	30 Minutes	30 Minutes
Tonbridge and Malling BC	No time limit	30 Minutes	No time limit
Tunbridge Wells BC	No time limit	30 Minutes	30 Minutes

3.2 The results for the Leaders Speech and petitions are set out below:

Table 3

Council	Leaders speech	Leaders Speech response	Petitioner speech	Total Petition time allowed
Ashford BC	No time limit	3 mins	10 mins	No Limit
Canterbury CC	10 mins	10 mins	3 mins	30 mins
Dartford BC	No leaders	speech	No speeches	15 mins per petition

Dover DC	15 mins	10 mins	10 mins	No Limit
Folkestone and Hythe DC	10 mins	5 mins	5 mins	No Limit
Gravesham BC	No time limit	5 mins	5 mins	15 mins per petition
Maidstone BC	No time limit	5 mins	5 mins	20 mins per petition
Sevenoaks DC	No time limit	5 mins	5 mins	15 mins per petition
Swale BC	7 mins	5 mins*	3 mins	30 mins
Thanet DC	10 mins	5 mins	5 mins	30 mins
Tonbridge and Malling BC	20 mins**	3 mins	N/A	N/A
Tunbridge Wells BC	No leaders	speech	10 mins	No Limit

* Other members can speak for 3 mins on the Leaders Speech as well the official response, within the overall 30 mins time limit .

** Leader and Cabinet members can split the time how they wish.

- 3.3 Council will see that there is a wide variety of options for all elements of a Council meeting across Kent. For ease the most common answer for each of the categories is outlined below:

Category	Most Common answer
Motions Allotted Time	No time limit
Questions. from Public Allotted Time	30 mins
Questions from Councillors Allotted Time	30 mins
Leaders speech	No time limit
Leaders Speech response	5 mins
Petitioner speech	5 mins
Total Petition time allowed	No Limit, or to have a time per petition limit

- 3.4 When comparing the most common arrangements with the arrangements that are in place at TDC, the committee will see that those timings match for; Questions from public, Questions from Councillors, Leaders Speech Response and Petitioner Speech.

- 3.5 TDC have a 30 minute time limit on Motions, whereas the most common answer for other Council's in Kent is not to have a time limit. TDC have a 10 minute time limit on the Leaders speech, whereas the most common answer for other Council's in Kent is not to have a time limit. TDC have a 30 minute limit on the time taken for considering petitions, whereas the most common answer for other Council's in Kent was to either not have a time limit or to limit the amount of time on each petition.

4. Constitutional Review Committee Recommendations

- 4.1 The Constitutional Review Committee met on 24 September 2024 and considered the evidence of practices by other councils detailed in section 3 of the report.
- 4.2 The committee agreed that it was important to get the balance right for reasonable allocating time for debating various items of the Full Council agenda without the need to postpone some items due pressure of time as it was important to debate these issues when they were first presented to Council. They agreed that a gradual approach to changing the time allocation for debating different items would ensure that a review can be undertaken to assess the impact of making such changes on the time it takes to transact all the items on a standard council agenda.
- 4.3 The committee therefore recommended that the time limit for discussion of Motions be changed from 30 minutes to 60 minutes for a trial period of 6 months after which this provision would be brought back to the Committee for review before making a final decision.
- 4.4 Depending on the outcome of the review discussed in para 4.2, above, this would be followed by further changes to time allocated for other items.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 Full Council should consider the evidence that has been sourced and shown in section 3 of the report, to see whether they wish to make changes to any of the timings. Full Council should take into consideration the impact on the length of the meeting if they increase time limits or remove them completely.
- 5.2 If Full Council amends the timings, Democratic Services will then make those changes to the constitution.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 There is no public law or statutory duty to consult in respect of the decision set out in this report.

7. Corporate Implications

7.1 Finance and Resources

7.1.1 There are no financial implications arising from the decision sought in this report.

7.2 Legal and Constitutional

7.2.1 Section 9P of the Local Government Act 2000 provides that:

(1) A local authority must prepare and keep up to date a document (referred to in this section as its constitution) which contains—

- (a) a copy of the authority's standing orders for the time being,
- (b) a copy of the authority's code of conduct (if any) for the time being under section 28 of the Localism Act 2011,
- (c) such information as the Secretary of State may direct, and
- (d) such other information (if any) as the authority considers appropriate.

7.2.2 A local authority has considerable discretion as to the content of its constitution though it should reflect relevant statute, regulation and guidance. There is nothing in either of the aforementioned to prevent the amendments sought being agreed.

7.2.3 The relevant constitutional provisions are referred to in the body of this report.

7.2.4 It is for the Full Council to make a final decision on any recommendations that are forwarded for consideration by the Constitutional Review Committee. It is the responsibility of Full Council to agree any amendments to the council's constitution.

7.3 Council Policies and Priorities

7.3.1 To work efficiently for you

7.4 Risk

7.4.1 There are no significant potential risk implications to the report.

7.5 Climate Change and Biodiversity

7.5.1 The decisions sought in this report will not have any impact on climate change or biodiversity.

8. Equality, Equity and Diversity Implications

8.1 The meeting is to have due regard to their public sector equality duty, which is the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and consider the potential impact decisions and actions on each of the protected characteristics, at the time the decision is taken. There are no direct equalities implications arising from the decisions sought in this report.

9. Crime and Disorder Implications and Community impact

9.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from the decision sought in this report.

Annexes

None

Background Papers

None

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Report Sign Off

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