

Standards Committee – 13 October 2022

AGENDA ITEM 5 – PUBLIC QUESTION TIME – ORDER IN WHICH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL WILL INVITE QUESTIONS BELOW RECEIVED IN WRITING IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

1. From Derrick Chester to the Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor P. English

THE FULL DETAIL OF THE QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED IS DETAILED BELOW

NOTE: The Chair will:

- Invite questions from members of the public who have submitted in writing their questions in line with the Council's Constitution.
- Explain that the questions received will be answered by the appropriate Members of the Committee.
- Confirm that Public Question Time allows Members of the public to ask one question at a time and that a maximum of one minute is allowed for each question.
- State that questions will be invited in the order in which they have been received and that if there is time remaining from the 15 minutes allowed for Public Question Time, questioners will be allowed to ask a supplementary question.

QUESTION ONE

From Derrick Chester to the Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor P. English

In para 4.4 of the report from the Monitoring Officer Mr Bainbridge states that it is a fundamental principle that officers and councillors work as one team. How does the monitoring officer balance that statement with the fundamental democratic principle that Councillors are elected to scrutinise the work of officers and represent their electorate. Surely there is a difference between expecting Councillors and Officers to treat each other with respect and courtesy in day to day dealings, respecting the decision making processes as set out in the constitution and carrying out the duty they were elected to perform? There always has been, is now and always will be differences of view and the public expect those to be respectfully explored in public meetings which is a vital way of ensuring the correct decisions are made in the end.

Response

Thank you for your question, Mr Chester.

The report at Item 6 explains that the Monitoring Officer is currently reviewing the Protocol on Member and Officer Relations and that a report will be brought to the Standards Committee meeting on 15 December. This is reflected in the Committee's Work Programme at Item 7 of today's agenda. The review of the Protocol is part of the Monitoring Officer's regular review of all Constitutional documents, including the Protocol, Code of Conduct and the wider Constitution.

The Protocol provides a guide to good working relationships between Members and Officers of the Council. It defines the respective roles of Members and Officers and provides principles of governing conduct. These include setting out that Members are elected and represent their communities, and that Officers are employed by and serve the whole Council, implementing decisions of the Council and making decisions under delegated powers. Officers do so in a politically-neutral way and serve all Members in an even-handed way.

The Protocol recognises that Officers and Members will work together from a position of mutual trust and courtesy. It makes clear that Members are free to criticise reports of the action taken by Officers but they should avoid personal attacks on Officers; ensure that any criticism is conveyed in such a way that is not disrespectful or bullying of an Officer; and be careful to not undermine Officers in such a way that is disrespectful or bullying of Officers at meetings, public forums, in the press or in any form of communication.

Therefore the balance you refer to is protected within the Protocol, while providing a guide for the way in which Members and Officers will work together to ensure the effective delivery of the Council's decision-making and its objectives. The report to the December Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer's review of the Protocol will set out any developments to the Protocol that are needed to guarantee this continues to be fit-for-purpose; is in line with national best practice and guidance; and that it can be practically applied in the Council's day-to-day operation.