

Annual Budget Meeting – Business Plan Debate

To: Constitution and Ethics Committee

Meeting Date: 14 November 2023

From: Service Director of Legal and Governance

Outcome: To consider changes to the Council's Constitution detailing the process by which the Business Plan debate will be conducted at the annual budget meeting.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

Recommend to Full Council the revisions to the Constitution set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Council's annual budget meeting takes place in February each year. Before the meeting, Group Leaders are consulted on a protocol for debating the Council's proposed business plan. At the meeting, the Council is then asked to suspend any standing orders in connection with the business plan debate in order to accommodate the agreed procedure.
- 1.2 Many local authorities have incorporated arrangements for debating the budget within their constitutions. At the moment, there is a lack of transparency in Cambridgeshire as to how the budget debate is conducted. There is also no authority regarding the timelines on submission of amendments, as the meeting to suspend standing orders occurs after the deadline for amendments.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 Proposed changes to the rules of debate in Chapter 4-1 of the Council's constitution (Council Procedure Rules), reflecting the current Budget Debate Protocol, are set out below and highlighted as additions in bold at Appendix 1 of the report. If Full Council agrees these changes, there will no longer be any need to suspend standing orders at each budget meeting.

Content and Length of Speeches

- 2.2 At the annual budget meeting, Group Leaders will have opening speeches immediately after the motion has been proposed and seconded, in order of members of the administration first and then the opposition, based on descending order of group size.

When a Member may Speak Again

- 2.3 Add a Section g) - For the annual budget debate, Group Leaders will also be able to speak during the main debate itself, following their opening speeches.

Amendments to Motions

- 2.4 Add to Section b) - At the annual budget meeting, due to the complexity of the Business Plan and the need for financial compliance, any significant* amendments must be submitted to the Section 151 Officer and the Democratic Services Manager at least five clear working days before the date of the meeting, in order to enable the Section 151 Officer to confirm whether the proposed amendments would result in a lawful budget.

Any minor* amendments must be submitted to the officers above not later than noon one working day before the date of Full Council.

[*Note – Amendments will be classified as significant if they call for changes which will require the Section 151 Officer to expend a considerable amount of time checking the budget figures. Minor amendments will be those that relate to a single budget line. The final decision as to whether an amendment is significant rests with the Section 151 Officer].

- 2.5 Add to Section c) - At the annual budget meeting, amendments will be debated in the order selected by the Chair of the Council, having regard to the proportionality of the groups.
- 2.6 Add a Section g) to state - At the annual budget meeting, if a majority vote in favour of either the original recommendation or the amended version cannot be achieved, the Chair shall immediately adjourn the debate and meeting, and ask Group Leaders to make themselves available with a view to commencing discussions / negotiations in order to arrive at a recommendation which will gain sufficient support to achieve a majority. As soon as a new recommendation has been proposed, (which is approved by the Section 151 officer), the Chair shall reconvene the meeting and ask for the amendment to be moved and debated.

3. Source Documents

- 3.1 [Council Constitution - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)