

PUBLIC SPEAKING AT MEETINGS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Relevant Lead Member	Councillor Joe Baker, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	N/A

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The report outlines the background to the Council's recent decision to introduce public speaking arrangements for a number of Committees and invites Members to consider which public speaking arrangements to put in place for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE on the following arrangements for public speaking at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings:

- 1) to require members of the public to register in advance of a meeting, *(with the length of time in advance to be determined by the Committee)* in order to speak at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;**
- 2) to set a limit of three or five minutes for each member of the public to speak at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;**
- 3) to set a limit of a maximum of 15 minutes to be dedicated to public speaking at the start of the meeting; and**
- 4) to specify any other arrangements considered necessary to enable public speaking at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

3. KEY ISSUES

Background

- 3.1 At a meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party (CRWP) on 12th February 2019 Members considered a complaint with regard to the potential for the public to speak at public Committee meetings. Some Committees, including Council, the Executive Committee and Planning Committee, already have arrangements in place which permit Members of the public to speak at

Committee meetings, subject to providing appropriate notice in accordance with the Council's constitutional requirements. However, public speaking arrangements are not formalised for some other Committees which meet in the public arena, including the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. At these meetings the public can only speak at the discretion of the Chair. The complaint called for residents to be provided with an opportunity to speak at all public Committee meetings.

- 3.2 The CRWP noted that at other local authorities the public are sometimes provided with an opportunity to speak at Committee meetings held in the public. Often a public speaking item will be included early on the agenda and residents can speak at Committee meetings during this item, subject to providing sufficient notice to the Council. Members agreed that a similar arrangement should be introduced at Redditch Borough Council for all Committees which held meetings that were open to the public and which did not already have arrangements in place that would enable the public to speak at those meetings.
- 3.3 The Licensing Committee, which considers and agrees changes to Licensing policies, recently considered a report in respect of public speaking. During this meeting Members agreed that each speaker should be allocated a maximum of three minutes to speak and a total of fifteen minutes would be dedicated to public speaking at the meeting. The Licensing Committee also agreed that members of the public should register to speak by 12 noon on the day of the meeting. As the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also reviews policies and working practices Members may want to consider agreeing a similar approach to public speaking to ensure consistency.

Registration and Public Speaking Content

- 3.4 The Council requires members of the public to register in order to speak at Committee meetings where public speaking arrangements have been in place for some time. For Planning Committee meetings residents are asked to register to speak on a particular item by 12 noon on the day of the Committee meeting.
- 3.5 Officers have reviewed public speaking arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny Committees in other parts of Worcestershire. The following arrangements are in place:
- Bromsgrove District Council – The public may speak at the discretion of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.
 - Malvern Hills District Council – There is a public speaking item at the start of the agenda. Each member of the public may speak for up to five minutes and a maximum of 30 minutes is allocated to public speaking. The public may speak on any issue relating to the general economic, social or environmental well-being or health of the community. Members of the public must register to speak by 9.00am on the working day before the meeting.
 - Worcester City Council – There is an item on the agenda for public speaking. Members of the public may speak about an item on the agenda and can

- speak for a maximum of five minutes about that item. Members of the public must register by 4.30pm the day before the meeting.
- Wychavon District Council – Members of the public are permitted to ask questions, submit evidence for a scrutiny investigation or suggest a scrutiny review. All requests to speak at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must be submitted by 10.00am the day before the meeting. Each resident can speak for a maximum of five minutes unless the Chair determines that more time should be allowed.
 - Wyre Forest District Council – Members of the public may register to speak about items on the agenda. They must register by 12 noon the day before the meeting. Up to five members of the public who wish to speak on an item may address the Committee. If more than five people wish to speak on the item they must nominate speakers to talk on their behalf.
- 3.6 In Redditch public speaking could entail residents addressing the Committee regarding their views in respect of a particular item on the agenda. Should this occur Members may wish to agree a short notice period for the registration, potentially similar to that for the Planning Committee.
- 3.7 At the Planning Committee residents are permitted to speak for three minutes on an application and where there are a group of supporters or objectors they are allowed no more than ten minutes in which to address the Committee. The Licensing Committee recently agreed to allocate a total of fifteen minutes to public speaking at each meeting.
- 3.8 Officers would suggest that, to ensure consistency across the Council for public speaking arrangements, Members should consider introducing time limits for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that are similar to those that are already in place for the Planning Committee and Licensing Committee.
- 3.9 To avoid disrupting the flow of the meeting, officers would recommend that the public speaking item be placed on the agenda at the start of the meeting before discussion of the individual reports. As with public speaking at Council, Members would not enter into any discussion with the speaker about their comments at the time, but would be able to refer to them in the course of consideration of the relevant item.

Financial Implications

- 3.10 No specific financial implications have been identified.

Legal Implications

- 3.11 No specific legal implications have been identified.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.12 Members are asked to note that the CRWP did not propose to introduce public speaking arrangements at private meetings. Therefore the information detailed in this report would not result in changes to proceedings for scrutiny Task Groups, Working Groups or Short Sharp Reviews. However, scrutiny Members are always able to consider permitting public speaking at meetings of these groups and may wish to do so on a case by case basis.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.13 The introduction of public speaking arrangements at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will enable the public to engage more effectively with the local democratic process.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

No specific risks have been identified.

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