



**CORPORATE & ENVIRONMENTAL  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:  
27 NOVEMBER 2019**

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**Report of: Corporate Director Transformation & Resources**

**Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor I Moran**

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**SUBJECT: PUBLIC SPEAKING PROTOCOL – REVIEW**

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Wards affected: Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To review the changes to the 'Public Speaking – Protocol' for meetings of Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committees, Audit & Governance Committee and Standards Committee (Constitution 14.1 – the "Protocol") suggested by the Committee at its meeting held on 11 July 2019.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the recommendations of the Committee, set out in paragraph 4 below, suggesting revisions to the 'Protocol', be noted and the changes set out in Appendix 1 to the report as tracked changes, be endorsed and referred to Cabinet and Council for approval

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## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Public Involvement in Meetings Working Group established the 'Public Speaking – Protocol' for meetings of Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committees, Audit & Governance Committee and Standards Committee (Constitution 14.1 – the "Protocol") as part of a task and finish review in 2015/16: "To consider extending public involvement at meetings, to create an open, transparent and democratic Council". The Protocol was introduced in April 2016. Following the cessation of the Working Group, it was agreed that any future reviews of the protocol would be considered at Corporate & Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee, with any recommendations for changes being submitted to Cabinet and Council.

3.2 The Protocol was reviewed and amended at Council in December 2017 to allow public speaking at the commencement of the appropriate item on the agenda

(rather than at the start of the meeting) and to extend the deadline for applications.

#### **4.0 CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 The Committee reviewed the Protocol at its meeting held on 11 July 2019 together with some general feedback that had been received from various sources and agreed that the following revisions should be made:

##### **4.1.1 Include reference to Parish Councils**

(A request was received from the Parish Clerks Liaison Meeting on 7 June 2019, when considering the Parish Council Charter, that there should be specific reference to Parish Council's eligibility to speak at meetings.)

Under the existing protocol Parish Council representatives are able to submit a request as a member of the public, however the Parish Clerks Liaison Group felt that in the spirit of the Charter, Parishes should be acknowledged specifically in the Protocol.

Appropriate wording has been included in the protocol which specifically acknowledges that Parish Councils as being eligible to speak.

##### **4.1.2 Provide for a resident to be represented by a Borough Councillor**

(Feedback was received from a Borough Councillor who had submitted a request in his own name, on behalf of a resident.)

Under the current protocol, if residents feel nervous or uncomfortable speaking in public, then they can ask someone else to do it for them, but they must be present at the meeting.

Appropriate wording has been included for a Borough Councillor to speak on the residents behalf, however given that in some instances, issues of predetermination/bias could be suggested, the Councillor should not be a member of the body considering the item.

##### **4.1.3 Provide for written representations to be considered without the need for the resident to attend**

(Feedback was received from a member of the public when he was unable to attend a meeting in person, but wished his written representations to be taken into consideration.)

In accordance with the current protocol, requests to speak are published and subsequently circulated to Members of the relevant body, including relevant officers.

Appropriate wording has been included in the protocol which advises that the relevant body will consider representations without the need for the resident to attend.

##### **4.1.4 Extend public speaking to Council meetings and the meeting to commence at an earlier start time of 7.00pm in order to accommodate**

(Feedback received from a Borough Councillor.)

The protocol has been amended to include meetings of Council.

There will be resource implications in agreeing this change, which are added below at paragraph 6.

- 4.2 Amendments to the Protocol, showing as tracked changes, is attached to this report at Appendix 1. The Committee is being asked to consider and approve the tracked changes. Once agreed the revised protocol will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration and then final approval by Council on 26 February 2020. The first meeting for operation of any agreed revisions would be Cabinet on 10 March 2019

## **5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The provision of public involvement in meetings provides another method to enable local people to raise concerns or state their views to the Council providing an additional feedback mechanism for the community and improving access for all.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Any revisions to the protocol should be accommodated within existing resources. In the event of an extension of the Protocol to cover Council there would be a need for officers to be available for the extended meeting and time in lieu would be required for relevant officers, taking them away from their other duties for that time and for any preparatory information to be provided to facilitate member's consideration.

## **7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 The Public Speaking Protocol provides an opportunity to further develop transparency and openness through public involvement at meetings.

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### **Background Documents**

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required, a formal equality impact assessment is attached as Appendix 2 to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report

### **Appendices**

1. Public Speaking Protocol (Constitution 14.1) (with tracked changes)
2. Equality Impact Assessment