



**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
Local Committee**

**LOCAL PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT
11 May 2007**

KEY ISSUE:

The County Council has agreed that Local Committees can make their own arrangements for handling matters related to public engagement, provided that these arrangements are set out in an approved protocol that is, in effect, a local addition to standing orders.

SUMMARY:

This report proposes a protocol to deal with public questions and petitions to the Local Committee in 2007-8.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the committee adopts the arrangements set out in this report:

Public Questions

- (i) that the committee will offer an opportunity for public engagement and informal questions for half an hour before each formal Local Committee meeting commences (subject to annual review);
- (ii) that written public questions, dealt with as part of the formal agenda, may be accepted up to 12.00 noon two working days before the day of the meeting;
- (iii) that members of the public may ask one brief supplementary question relevant to the subject of the original, at the discretion of the chairman.

Petitions

- (iv) that the committee will accept a petition carrying 50 or more signatures, although in exceptional circumstances the Chairman may use his/her discretion to accept petitions with fewer signatures in cases where it would not be appropriate to get 50 signatures, for example where a proposed scheme affects fewer than 50 properties.

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 In the County Council's Constitution, Standing Orders 40.1 and 40.2 state that:

“Local Committees shall comply fully with these Standing Orders (parts 2 and 3) except where they draw up local protocols allowing them discretion to make minor variations to working practices which may only relate to arrangements for public engagement, including arrangements for the presentation of petitions, public question time etc. and monitoring service performance locally.

Any local protocols shall be drawn up by the Area Director in consultation with the Head of Democratic and Local Leadership, and approved by the Local Committee”.

- 1.2 This report reminds members of the local protocol that the Local Committee (Runnymede) adopted in 2006/07, and proposes that the arrangements remain the same for 2007/8.

2. Public Questions

- 2.1 Standing Orders 65 to 65.5 relate to public questions (annex 1).

Standing Order 65.1 states that the notice for public questions is 7 days. Since 2005, the Local Committee (Runnymede) has accepted questions received up to 12.00 noon two working days before the Committee, and it is recommended that this is continued.

- 2.2 It is also recommended that, at the discretion of the chairman, members of the public may ask one brief supplementary question relevant to the subject of the original.

- 2.3 At present, an **informal** question time is held for half an hour before the start of the formal Local Committee meeting. This enables members of the public who wish to ask one or more questions on matters of local interest without prior notice to raise such matters with their local county councillors in public. It is recommended that this question time be continued.

3. Petitions

- 3.1 Standing Orders 64 to 64.5 relate to petitions.

- 3.2 Standing Order 64 states that petitions presented require 100 signatures. The Local Committee may wish to have brought to its attention matters affecting relatively few households. In most cases, a decision to allow petitions which carry at least 50 signatures will address this, but in some circumstances it may be appropriate for the chairman to exercise their discretion to accept a petition carrying fewer signatures. Such

circumstances would be those where it would not be appropriate to collect 50 signatures, for example if the issue related to a scheme where fewer than 50 houses would be affected.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The Council has amended Standing Orders to allow Local Committees to vary procedural rules to make their proceedings more accessible and to promote engagement with the public. Within the limited scope afforded by this relaxation, the report proposes that the current practice of the Local Committee (Runnymede) is continued.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: Constitution of the Council

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Annex 1

Public Questions – Extract from Standing Orders

“65 At the start of any ordinary meeting of the Executive or any Committee, any member of the public who is an elector of the Surrey County Council area may ask one question relating to a matter within the Executive’s or Committee’s terms of reference. Questions will not be allowed on matters which are “confidential” or “exempt” under the Local Government Access to Information Act 1985 or on planning applications. Questions should relate to general policy and not to detail”

“65.1 Notice must be given in writing or by e:mail to the Chief Executive at least 7 days before the meeting”

“65.2 The Chief Executive may, having consulted the questioner, reword any question received to bring it into proper form and to secure reasonable brevity. Copies will be circulated to Members of the Executive or Committee as appropriate.”

“65.3 Questions will be taken in the order in which they are received by the Chief Executive and directed to the appropriate Executive Member or Committee Chairman. Questions will be asked and answered without discussion. Any Member may decline to answer a question, provide a written reply or nominate another Member to answer it on his/her behalf.”

“65.4 The number of questions which may be asked at any one meeting may not exceed six and the Chairman may exercise his/her discretion to regard a single question which has been divided into a number of sub-questions as several different questions within the allowable total number which may be asked at the meeting. The Chairman may also disallow questions which are repetitious.”

“65.5 Questions which are received after the first six will be held over to the following meeting or dealt with in writing at the Chairman’s discretion.”

Petitions - – Extract from Standing Orders

“64 At the start of any ordinary meeting of the Executive or a committee, any member of the public who is an elector of the Surrey County Council area may present a petition, containing 100 or more signatures, relating to a matter within the terms of reference of the Executive or the committee as appropriate. The presentation of a petition on the following business will not be allowed:

- (a) matters which are “confidential” or “exempt” under the Local Government Access to Information Act, 1985; and
- (b) planning applications.”

64.1 A spokesman for the petitioners may address the Executive or the Committee on the petition for no more than 3 minutes but thereafter may not speak further. The petition may be referred without discussion to the next appropriate meeting of the Executive or Committee at the discretion of the Chairman.”

“64.2 Notice must be given in writing to the Chief Executive at least 14 days before the meeting.”

“64.3 No more than 3 petitions may be presented at any one meeting of the Executive or a committee.”

“64.4 The Chief Executive may amalgamate within the first petition, other petitions of like effect on the same subject.”

“64.5 The presentation of a petition on the same or similar topic as one presented in the last six months will not be allowed.”