

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Referral from Audit Committee – Length of Meetings

18 March 2010

Report of the Head of Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To ask the Committee to consider the recommendations of the Audit Committee that consideration be given to introducing limits on the length of meetings held without breaks for Members or officers by amending Council Procedure Rule 10 in the constitution.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the Committee considers the following recommendations from the Audit Committee regarding length of meetings

(a) That Council Procedure Rule 10 be amended in the Constitution to read as follows:

Council Procedure Rule 10

10.1 Interruption of the Meeting

The meeting shall adjourn after periods of 2 and 4 hours for breaks of 10 and 30 minutes respectively, save that the Chairman, at his/her discretion, may waive the adjournment if it is likely that the business can be finished shortly.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Committee will be aware that during the past year there have been a number of instances where important decision making meetings have lasted for an extended period of time. Concern has been expressed by a Member over the pressure this places on both those Members present and the officers supporting the meeting.

1.2 At the present time the Constitution contains just one Procedural Rule relating to the length of time without a break which is utilised mainly at full Council. Even this provides only for a break after a period of 4 hours as follows:

Council Procedure Rule 10

10.1 Interruption of the Meeting

The meeting shall adjourn after a period of 4 hours (normally at 6.00pm in the case of full Council) for a break of 30 minutes, save that the Chairman, at his/her discretion, may waive the adjournment if it is likely that the business can be finished shortly.

- 1.3 On reaching 6pm, officer advice is normally provided on whether any items can be deferred to a later date to enable the meeting to be closed rather than adjourned, although as evidenced at the Council meeting of 4 March 2009, this is not always possible.
- 1.4 At other meetings breaks are taken by agreement of those present at suitable moments in the agenda.
- 1.5 It is generally accepted that powers of concentration diminish after a period of 2 hours and Members may wish to consider introducing additional procedure rules into the Constitution which would ensure that more regular breaks are taken both for the comfort of those present and to improve concentration levels and the ability to deal with often complex issues and make good quality decisions.
- 1.6 At its meeting on 20 January 2010 Audit Committee recommended that Council Procedure Rule 10 be amended to read as follows:

Council Procedure Rule 10

10.1 Interruption of the Meeting

The meeting shall adjourn after periods of 2 and 4 hours for breaks of 10 and 30 minutes respectively, save that the Chairman, at his/her discretion, may waive the adjournment if it is likely that the business can be finished shortly.

- 1.7 The Committee is asked to consider amending the Constitution as above in order to ensure that there are limits on the length of meetings held without breaks.

2.0 Options

- 2.1 Option 1 – Amend Council Procedure Rule 10 in the Constitution as recommended, and place restrictions on the length of meetings without breaks.
- 2.2 Option 2 – Do not amend Council Procedure Rule 10 in the Constitution and take no action regarding any restriction on the length of meetings.

3.0 Officer Comments

- 3.1 The Officer preference is Option 1 in order to ensure that regular breaks are taken, reducing the pressure on officers supporting meetings and improving decision making.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)
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There are no direct implications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications to the introduction of breaks in long meetings – it is not anticipated that there would be any significant increase in staff time and resources and this would be contained within existing budgets.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Agenda and minutes of Audit Committee, 20
January 2010

Contact Officer: Tom Silvani

Telephone: 01524 582132

E-mail: tsilvani@lancaster.gov.uk

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