

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2021

REFERENCE FROM COUNCIL

MOTION – QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSIONS FOR MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AT COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

At the meeting of the Council held on 24 February 2021, the following motion was moved by Councillor Adkinson, seconded by Councillor M Rose:

At the meeting of the Democracy and General Purposes Committee on 27 January 2021 a member of the public queried the Council's approach to minuting the responses to questions to the Chairs of Committees from members of the public and Councillors.

Almost ironically, the minutes to said meeting merely stated "The Chair responded to the question".

This is in accordance with current practice, meaning that anyone wanting to know the actual response to a question or any supplementary question has to trawl through webcasts to find the answers as the written minutes are not a complete record of proceedings.

It is claimed that the current system is a matter of practicality as "the minutes would become pages and pages long, there would be queries over the exact wording used and it is an intensive process to record every word of answers".

Bearing in mind that the vast majority of answers are provided by Officers and read verbatim by Chairs, this argument does not hold water.

And there is also a concern that Youtube's archiving policy may not fulfil the requirement upon Maidstone Borough Council to retain important materials for several years.

This Council therefore resolves to amend the Constitution to require that the gist of answers to questions and supplementary questions from the public and Councillors are recorded in the written minutes.

During the discussion, with the agreement of the mover and the seconder, the scope of the motion was widened to seek a review of the terms of reference for question and answer sessions, including the platform on which questions should be answered.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 18.5, the motion, as amended, was referred to the Democracy and General Purposes Committee.

A copy of the briefing note which was prepared to assist Members in their consideration of the motion is attached as Appendix A.

RECOMMENDED: That the Committee consider the motion, as amended, relating to question and answer sessions for Members and members of the public at Council and Committee meetings.