

Item: 11

General Meeting of the Council: 3 July 2018.

Notice of Motion.

Report by Chief Executive.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the implications of the Notice of Motion, lodged by Councillor John A R Scott, and countersigned by three other members, as detailed on the agenda for this meeting.

2. Recommendations

The Council is invited to note:

2.1.

That the Chief Executive has received a Notice of Motion requesting that the Council introduces a Question and Answer session to the General Meeting.

2.2.

That the implications of the Notice of Motion are mainly in Councillor and officer time, as a result of the additional workload which would arise from introduction of such a system.

2.3.

That there are existing mechanisms which allow members opportunities to become apprised of issues and business within the Council in both a public and informal setting.

It is recommended:

2.4.

That a Question and Answer Session at the General Meeting should not be introduced.

3. Notice of Motion

3.1.

The Notice of Motion, detailed on the agenda for this meeting, lodged on 6 June 2018 in accordance with Standing Order 94, seeks to introduce a Question and Answer session to the General Meeting which allows councillors to ask pertinent pre-notified questions and receive responses from either the Leader or one of the Committee Chairs. The Notice of Motion also requests that a further supplementary question may be put by the questioner on the same issue if they are not fully satisfied with the response.

3.2.

The Notice of Motion also suggests that the Questions be lodged with the Chief Executive at least five working days in advance of the General Meeting and a maximum time limit of 20 minutes be placed on the session.

3.3.

Standing Order 68.1 states that a Notice of Motion shall be accompanied by a report from the relevant Executive Director on the implications of any suggested course of action.

4. Implications

4.1.

The Notice of Motion seeks the introduction of a Question and Answer session at the General Meeting.

4.2.

This type of Question and Answer session is utilised in the main in other councils where there is a political party in power together with an 'opposition'. The session is used by the 'opposition' political parties to scrutinise the controlling party and hold them to account in respect of their manifesto, or question them on other pertinent issues.

4.3.

A sample of the questions seen in some councils tend to comprise of matters such as:

- Update on progress with projects.
- Update on performance and operational business within the council.
- Update on discussions held at a political level.
- Seeking the views of a member in respect of a particular matter.

4.4.

The political structure of Orkney Islands Council differs from other councils in that this Council does not have an 'opposition'. The Council develops and approves by consensus and sets its plans and priorities as one body. The Council scrutinises and monitors performance of delivery of these priorities, and current political issues, through both public and informal mechanisms. These are:

- Council, Committee and Sub-committee meetings.
- Members' sessions held regularly on a Monday morning.
- Members' Forum held quarterly.
- Council Seminars.
- Discussions with Senior and Corporate Management Teams directly.

4.4.1.

Standing Orders allow any member to attend a meeting of a Committee of which s/he is not a member. In addition, upon invitation by the Chief Executive to attend the meeting, a member may participate in the deliberations of the Committee in respect of the items for which s/he has been invited.

4.5.

A Question and Answer session would therefore be in addition to the mechanisms outlined above and may result in duplication or revisiting of debates previously held in Committee meetings.

4.6.

A protocol and procedure would require to be developed to set out how members lodge questions and how they are then taken forward to provide written answers in the five working days prior to the meeting. Additionally, other officers may be required to attend the Council meeting to assist with the provision of information for any supplementary questions.

4.7.

In conclusion, the implications of the Notice of Motion are mainly in Councillor and officer time to initially develop a protocol and procedure for such a session. Following this, administration of a session would also require ongoing Councillor and officer time and resource. It is felt that the existing mechanisms referred to above do however give members opportunities to become apprised of issues and business within the Council in both public and informal settings and it is therefore recommended not to introduce a question and answer session.

4.8.

Should the Notice of Motion be approved, it is suggested that a report be submitted, to the Policy and Resources Committee, regarding the detailed protocol and procedure, together with an assessment of the additional workload and potential resources which might be required as a result of introduction of such a scheme.

5. Corporate Governance

This report relates to governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

6. Financial Implications

The financial implications of the Notice of Motion being accepted by the Council would be that staff resources would be diverted to developing a process, and if approved, implementing the process for a Question and Answer Session. In addition, additional staff resource may be diverted to attending Council Meetings to be on hand to answer any supplementary questions.

7. Legal Aspects

7.1.

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 makes provision for the regulation of meetings of local authorities and authorises the Council to make Standing Orders for the regulation of its proceedings and business.

7.2

If the Motion is passed, it would be appropriate to amend the Council's existing Standing Orders by including any specific provisions that would apply to the question and answer session within Council Meetings.

8. Contact Officer

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