

Report to: **Governance Committee**

Date: **12 July 2016**

By: **Assistant Chief Executive**

Title of report: **Length of Speeches at County Council and Cabinet meetings**

Purpose of report: **To consider proposals from councillors regarding the length of speeches at County Council and Cabinet meetings**

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is requested to:

- 1. consider whether to recommend to the County Council an amendment to the Constitution in relation to the length of speeches; and**
 - 2. consider whether to recommend to Council that be a time limit for speeches at Cabinet meetings**
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1. Supporting Information

1.1 A request has been received from members of the Labour Group to consider:

(i) whether the length of time that councillors are allowed to speak at County Council should be reduced to two or three minutes on the basis that this is sufficient time for members to make their point and would keep meetings more focussed and relevant.

(ii) whether a time limit should be imposed for member speeches at Cabinet meetings on the basis that there is a time limit on speaking at County Council meetings; it would be conducive to the orderly conduct of meetings; and in the absence of a limit the Chair of Cabinet runs the risk of being accused of unfairly allowing some members to speak longer than others (a view, the Labour Group were keen to point out, was not held by them)

1.2 Any change to the time limits would require a change to the Constitution.

2. The current arrangements

2.1 County Council meetings

2.1.1 The Standing Order in relation to the length of speeches at County Council meetings states:

Length of speeches

23. *No speech shall exceed five minutes except where:*

- (1) *a Chair of a Committee (or other nominated member) or the Nominated Spokesperson of the East Sussex Fire Authority is exercising a right of reply;*

- (2) *the Leader of the Council and the Leaders of the Opposition Groups are speaking at the start of the debate at the annual meeting on the Cabinet's priorities. In this instance, each Leader shall be permitted to speak for up to 11 minutes – see Standing Order 45.*
- (3) *the Council (without debate) allows a member to continue his or her speech for a further period or periods, not exceeding three minutes each; or*
- (4) *the Council (without debate) consents.*

2.2 Cabinet meetings

2.2.1 The Cabinet Procedure Rules state:

With the agreement of the Chair, a councillor (who is not a member of the Cabinet) may speak at meetings of the Cabinet where a decision affects that member's division or known special interest.

2.2.2 Since the last election the Council has been no overall control but operating an executive system and so the Leader has allowed any member who wishes to speak to do so, and no time limit has been imposed.

2.2.3 It has also been suggested by a member of the Labour Group, that consideration should be given to having a time limit for speeches by non-Cabinet members at Cabinet meetings. The point has been made having a time limit would ensure that all non-Cabinet members received an equal time to speak and may provide a greater focus for contributions. The introduction of a time limit would also mirror the process adopted for Council meetings.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Committee is asked to consider whether to recommend any changes to the length of speeches at meetings of the County Council and Cabinet.

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[Background Documents](#)