

Report for: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting: 13 March 2024

Subject: Correspondence sent to Members and Residents.

Cabinet Member: Cllr Luke Taylor, Leader

Dear Members and Residents,

The proposals for discussion at the Standards committee tonight are to bring Mid Devon in line with neighbouring Councils, and strengthen our processes. Somerset Council requires members of the public to register to speak 3 working days prior to a general meeting. Devon County requires 4 working days. I would like Mid Devon to adopt the shorter of these - 3 working days – for questions that will receive an answer in the meeting itself. This time requirement is not arbitrarily chosen, it is used to allow information to be researched and verified to provide complete answers.

With many Councils that is the extent of public questions, but I have always been clear that I want Mid Devon to be a leader amongst its peers, not a follower. This is why when my administration was formed, I made a public commitment to not only provide full answers to questions that are provided in advance, but also to allow registered members of the public to ask additional questions at the meeting to be answered later when the information can be obtained. I have therefore asked for the proposed changes before us to be amended to make this crystal clear.

I respect the work of the LGA's Planning Advisory Service in bringing forward proposed changes to bring us in line with other Councils regarding not having a general public question time at the Planning Committee. However, I also note that its advice was prepared during the disfunction of the previous council and it may or may not still be what is best for us today. I would like the current Council's Planning Committee to have their say on any proposals that affect their committee. I have asked for the Planning Committee rules to remain unchanged.

As a Council we are making many changes to increase public engagement in our meetings. We have recently invested in new audio/visual equipment in our Council chambers to improve the remote experience, both for participants and presentations. We will shortly be providing the ability for videos of our meetings to be published alongside the minutes. I am, as ever, always keen to hear feedback and suggestions on how we can further increase the governance, quality, and accessibility of our meetings.