

APPENDIX A



PAPER 4 – Scrutiny Chairs’ Forum meeting, 26 May 2015

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEES - PROPOSAL

Introduction

Scrutiny has been seeking to introduce public questions to its public meetings for some time. The Chairs’ Liaison Forum has discussed the topic, which featured as a recommendation in PRAP’s “Public Engagement with Scrutiny” Inquiry report. Constitution Committee has received one report, and is awaiting a second report, once the Scrutiny Chairs have discussed and agreed a way forward.

This report seeks to advise the Chairs on an opportunity that has been discussed with the Cardiff Third Sector Council to pilot public questions during the autumn of 2015.

Proposal

When Scrutiny Services has previously canvassed individual citizens via Capital Times on the kinds of questions they would like to ask at Scrutiny, we have received back a range of very personal inquiries about individual (often very small) requests for service or complaints about bin collection or dog mess. Some have bordered on criticism of individual officers that might be difficult to substantiate, or could be contentious.

While approaching individual citizens for questions is a potential option, there may be additional benefits of channelling questions through the third sector, as follows:

- Third sector organisations will have evidence-based and longitudinal awareness of issues relating to local service delivery.
- They will have an ongoing relationship with the Council, enabling questions to have a medium term legacy.
- They will potentially engage a large base of service users, making the communication and involvement more extensive and inclusive
- They will be likely to understand the Council’s meeting administration processes more than individual citizens.

- It could enhance the relationship between Cardiff Council and the Third Sector Council, potentially unlocking ideas for work programming and fulfilling the requirement in the Local Government Measure 2011's Statutory Guidance for this to happen.

The Third Sector Council is interested in providing questions to be delivered at Scrutiny Committee meetings in the autumn. Some guiding principles could include:

- One question per meeting at each of the five committees per month for two months (ie 10 questions in all), which would hold a senior officer or Cabinet Member to account for something that they are responsible for.
- This element to take no longer than 30 minutes at each meeting, and also contribute to an already programmed Agenda item.
- Questions would not be censored, but would need to be relevant to the items planned for discussion.
- Some value could be added in to the process before the meeting by explaining to interested parties how scrutiny items come up for discussion, briefing them on the agendas for a meeting that they might be attending, and introducing to the Chair. Equally, third sector organisations could communicate their experiences through their networks following the meetings.
- The process would not be "cosy" or tokenistic, and would be managed in a spirit of co-production. It would, however, need to be undertaken with the same respect and rules of engagement that are currently followed in scrutiny meetings.
- From the lessons learned from the pilot, both C3SC and the elected Members could reflect on the value of potentially introducing a sustainable programme of public questioning at future scrutiny or other Council committees.

Next Steps

- C3SC to canvass potential questions from its members and networks, and supply these to Scrutiny Services. These could both provide useful intelligence on the kinds of issues that third sector organisations might like to be considered on Committee work programmes, and a list of potential questions for this pilot activity.
- Scrutiny Services to consult Chairs and agree potential questions that would complement existing plans for agenda items in October and November .
- Precise arrangements for the meetings to be determined.