

Recommendation to Council on 25 November 2010	From: Constitution Advisory Group	on 18 October 2010
	Oral Questions at Council	
1.	Council is asked to approve the amendment of Part B of the Constitution by:-	
	(a)	an additional paragraph to be inserted to become a new paragraph 3.2.1.10 , with the following wording: “Members of the Council may also ask any question without notice on matters relating to the functions of the Bedfordshire Police Authority and the Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority. This period of questions and answers shall last no more than 10 minutes.” with the paragraphs following it to be renumbered; as set out in Appendix A attached;
	(b)	paragraph 12.1.1 to be amended by the deletion of the words “(or of a body referred to in Rule 12.2.1.4)” and the insertion of “or report” after “upon a recommendation”; as set out in Appendix A attached;
	(c)	all references in Part B5 paragraph 3.2.1.12 and section 12.7 (throughout) to “oral questions” to be changed to “open questions”.
	Background	
2.	The Constitution Advisory Group, at its meeting on 18 October 2010, considered a report further to comments made by Members on procedures for “oral questions” at particular points in Council meetings. It was noted that the procedures for “oral questions “ were complicated by the need to time the periods for specific kinds of questions (ie those to a chairman of a committee or a member representing the Police and Fire authorities, and those to the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holders).	
3.	It was also noted that the term “oral” questions was a misnomer as the Constitution required them to be drafted in advance of the start of the meeting.	
4.	Constitution Advisory Group considered several approaches for improving the procedures, including:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • removing the need to draft questions in advance of the Council meeting 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using a coloured card system so that it was clear to all at the Council meeting what category of question was about to be asked
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confining specific kinds of questions to a particular part of the agenda, ie questions on Bedfordshire Police Authority and Luton and Bedfordshire Combined Fire Authority matters.
5.	The Advisory Group considered that it would not be appropriate to remove the requirement for oral questions to be drafted in advance of the meeting. Members considered that the term “oral questions” should be replaced in the Constitution with the term “open questions”, as the term “oral questions” was considered to be misleading.
6.	The Advisory Group further considered that it would be appropriate for all questions relating to the Bedfordshire Police Authority and the Bedfordshire and Luton combined Fire Authority to be confined to one part of the proceedings of the meeting.
7.	These should be dealt with at the same point that reports from those bodies are considered . The period for oral questions (to be known as “open questions”) later on the agenda would only be for questions of the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holders, and the chairman of a committee, and would no longer include questions of a member representing the Fire or Police authorities.
8.	The Advisory Group considered that it would be appropriate for questions relating to the Police and Fire Authority matters to have a time-limit of 10 minutes. Oral (or “open”) questions under Part B5 paragraph 12.7.1.5 to the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holders, and a chairman of a committee, should have a time limit of 45 minutes.
9.	The recommendations set out above, which would amend the Constitution as shown in Appendix A attached, would enable:-
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire and Police Authorities matters to be dealt with in one place on the agenda
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oral questions to be put at the appropriate sections of the meeting would continue to be drafted before the meeting started
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • removal of the need for a specific kind of question to be sought out in the container of questions, which could lead to an impression of questions being sifted for reasons other than simply whether they were in a particular category for timing purposes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the term “oral” questions” to be replaced with the term “open” questions. 	
Appendices	Appendix A	Sets out how the Constitution would change if Council approves the recommendations

[Please note that a copy of the original report can be found on the Central Bedfordshire Council web site at the following link:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=19637>]