

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Policy & Resources Committee – For decision Court of Common Council – For decision	Dated: 16 January 2025 6 March 2025
Subject: Standing Orders Review – January 2025	Public report: For Decision
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides statutory duties • provides business enabling functions 	Corporate Governance
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£n/a
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	n/a
Report of: The Town Clerk and Chief Executive	Ian Thomas, CBE
Report author: Assistant Town Clerk and Executive Director of Governance and Member Services	Polly Dunn

Summary

Following the commission of a review in the Standing Orders, with prescribed scope (agreed by Policy and Resources Committee in July 2024), this report presents a series of amendments to the Standing Orders, for Members approval.

The amendments contained within proposals predominantly sit within three categories: clarifications to existing practice; changes to how business is conducted (or no change where it was felt there was insufficient appetite to do so); and areas that require further review/consultation before recommendations can be brought forward, to be commissioned if the Committee wishes.

Recommendation(s)

Members of the Committee are invited to consider and approve:

1. the Standing Order revisions set out in Appendix 1, summarised in Appendix 2 and marked “clarification of existing practice” and “introduction of process”, for

onward consideration by the Court of Common Council in March and adoption from April 2025;

2. the Standing Order revisions set out in Appendix 1, summarised in Appendix 2 and marked “Change” and “No change”, for onward consideration by the Court of Common Council in March and adoption from April 2025;
3. Agree to delegate authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, to make any necessary revisions to the draft Standing Orders to give rise to any amendments proposed from debate (if not agreed in the meeting), before final consideration by the Court of Common Council.
4. To note that, upon adoption by the Court of Common Council, that the Town Clerk will develop a suite of supplementary guidance documents to the Standing Orders (e.g. Frequently Asked Questions, Glossary of Terms etc.);
5. To note that any consequential formatting changes (e.g. numbering) will be overseen by the Town Clerk, upon final approval; and
6. To note that a further report on the areas marked “further review required” will be required if Members wish to explore those proposals further, to ensure proper consideration on wider implications, including consultation across the organisation.

Main Report

Background

1. As prescribed by the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 1993, local authorities (and the City of London Corporation acting in its capacity as a local authority, police authority and port health authority) must have Standing Orders which set out how formal business, including decision making, is to be transacted.
2. These three activities (local, police and port health authority) sit under the “City Fund” budget. However, the City of London Corporation has more responsibilities beyond those associated with its local authority designation. The activities of the City Corporation that are considered private and/or charitable currently sit under the “City’s Estate” budget. Management of the City Bridge Foundation, including its assets, is also distinct. Much of the business transacted by the City does, however, involve two or more areas.
3. Whilst there are some explicit variations within the Court of Common Council’s Standing Orders (e.g. for the City Bridge Foundation), describing how business is transacted differently across these three funds, they apply across all of the Court’s responsibilities and powers. For the avoidance of any confusion, the Court of Aldermen have distinct, separate, Standing Orders. It is also worth noting that there are some committees which are not within the purview of the Court. For example, the Livery Committee, which is a committee of Common Hall; the House Committee of the Guildhall Club; and other outside bodies such as Committee of Aldermanic Almoners, Common Council Governors and Donation Governors of Christ’s Hospital

4. The Court of Common Council's Standing Orders should be reviewed regularly. In July 2024, the Policy and Resources Committee agreed to a review with a defined scope (available in the background report), with the intention of ensuring that changes were made and implemented in time for the April 2025, the first meeting after the all-out Common Councillor elections.

Current Position

5. In broad terms, the scope for the Standing Order review recently commissioned by the Policy and Resources Committee, focussed on the Standing Orders relating to the conduct of business at meetings of the Court, its Committees and their Sub-Committees.
6. As part of the agreed consultation exercise, Members were invited to submit written submissions. There were also ten informal briefing sessions held over the course of September and October. These were themed sessions, based on the following categories:
 - a) Conduct of debate at Court
 - b) Court (and Committee) Questions
 - c) Conduct of Debate at Committee
 - d) Appointment Processes (for Committee membership)
 - e) Appointment processes (for the roles of Chair/Deputy Chair)
7. There were two sessions per "theme", held at varying times of the day in order to maximise opportunities for attendance. Virtual attendance and participation was facilitated.
8. Whilst discussion at each session largely focussed on the intended theme, Members were encouraged at every opportunity to make any other observations that they felt were relevant to the wider review.
9. Following these ten sessions, which elicited a wide range of comments and suggestions, officers sought to respond to all the observations and presented draft amendments to an informal meeting of the Court of Common Council in November. The meeting of the Informal Court was an extremely valuable exercise with some key matters highlighted for further consideration. These areas have been revisited and addressed to within the various appendices. Beyond this, there seemed to be general support for the direction of travel within the proposals. There remains to be a divergence of opinion on some discrete matters, which are articulated later in the report.
10. Chief Officers were also written to, and their team's were invited to make suggestions.

11. Beyond this, as a general approach, officers have also sought to, where appropriate, consider any broader equalities implications and generally to evaluate whether the Standing Orders presented any barriers to participation.
12. It is important to note in the consideration of this report that there are some Standing Orders that are limited by legislation. Whilst the Court is sovereign over matters under its control, national legislation and common law positions must be considered and adhered to. Conversely, there are some areas where an individual authority has a significant amount of flexibility in how it wishes to discharge its responsibilities. It is for this reason that, in the event any more complex amendment is proposed at Policy & Resources Committee, it is recommended for the Town Clerk be given authority to finalise the wording, following adequate consultation with the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and relevant officers. Alternatively, a further report could be submitted to your Policy and Resources Committee in February.
13. Given the breadth of changes proposed, in-keeping with how recent Standing Order revisions have been managed, proposals have been categorised in order to help facilitate debate. These categories are:
 - a) Clarification of Existing Practice – which seek to provide updates that reflect existing procedures, with no change to how business is conducted.
 - b) Introduction of Process – which seek to provide a transparent, more formal, process in relation to activities detailed within the Standing Orders.
 - c) Change / No Change – areas that garnered more disparate, if not conflicting views (or where there are simply multiple options on how a concern might be addressed, but with no clear Member preference).
 - d) Further Review Required – areas where Members demonstrated a strength of feeling but where, in officers' opinion, further review and consultation would be required in order to present a series of feasible options, including associated implications.

Clarification of Existing Practice

14. The Table in Appendix 2 features amendments which, in principle, are considered more straightforward, insofar as there did not appear to be any dissent, only an appetite to clarify existing processes, so they were clearer for Members to understand. This also includes and correction of typographical errors. The detail of each amendment, and why it is proposed, can be found in that same Appendix.

15. At this juncture it seems useful to highlight that a predominant theme from the various consultation sessions, was how some Members found the document hard to digest, particularly when attempting to establish how they might exercise a function within the Standing Orders, whilst in a live committee/Court setting.
16. It became clear that the document in its current form, assumes a lot of knowledge on historic City practices. For example, SO10(5) references that, in the event that there is no contest for multiple vacancies on a committee with varying term lengths, that these be allocated by 'seniority' (unless otherwise agreed by the individuals concerned). Upon discussion, it became apparent that many Members were uncertain as to how seniority of Membership was determined. We have, therefore, sought to add footnotes and, subject to adoption, will produce supplementary guidance documents that will help facilitate Members in their understanding of the Standing Orders and how they work in practice.
17. There were a number of other observations along a similar vein. There has been significant confusion caused by the inconsistent approach to the nomenclature around grand committees, committees, boards and sub-committees; how these translate through to the Standing Orders, and the clear need to debunk common misapprehensions that have arisen from this confusion.
18. Beyond that, there were a few areas where, for whatever reason, the Standing Orders were silent. For example, there was no reference to how amendments were to be managed within Committee or Sub-Committee setting. Again, the proposed amendments today simply seek to establish the existing "status quo".
19. There are some changes that are entirely presentational, such as the re-ordering of Standing Orders, to help with the readability of the document.

Matters for consideration: "Change" and "No Change"

20. Beyond the aforementioned amendments, there were a series of proposed changes where there was a divergence of opinion and/or there are multiple solutions to the same concerns (and where, as referenced earlier in the report, the Court has more flexibility in its own arrangements). Officers have attempted to recommend changes that balanced various positions whilst adhering to general principles of good governance, but Members may wish to debate whether these changes represent the best options.
21. These matters for consideration (with detail provided in appendices) are:
 - Increasing time permitted to establish a quorum at Court.
 - Addressing the different voting method currently used when Court is appointing to a committee where there are more than two candidates standing for one

vacancy (i.e. why we use a preferential voting system sometimes, and first past the post in others). (No change)

- Reducing the time allotted to speakers in debate at Court.
- Encouraging advance submission of amendments at Court.
- Reducing time allotted to the Mover of an original Motion, in response to debate on an Amendment.
- Bringing the Court Questions deadline forward by two days.
- Restricting Members to one Court Question per meeting (not including supplementaries) – to be waived in the event that a Question has been rolled over from the previous meeting.
- Town Clerk to be able to redirect Court Questions to a Chair of a more appropriate committee (Lord Mayor to rule in any event of dispute).
- Reduction of speaking time allotted to the Questioner and Chair, for Court Questions.
- No change proposed to the overall envelope of time allotted for Court Questions (40 minutes).
- Increase to the number of individuals that can ask a supplementary question at Court, but removal of the ability to ask second supplementary question.
- Introduction of a time limit for supplementary questions to be delivered
- With respect to each of these, there a number of feasible variations, with various options.
- No introduction of any penalty/disqualification from a committee or sub-committee for Members who routinely fail to attend meetings of that committee/sub-committee. (No change)
- Introduction of a consistent procedure for appointing committees to vote for Chairs/Deputy Chairs of its Sub-Committees.
- Slight amendment to the powers of the Chair, mainly the requirement to consult with the Town Clerk and, in some circumstances, the wider committee.
- Changes proposed to the current exception to the Chair of Natural Environment Board/West Ham Park Committee to Chair a third committee (bringing in consistency with other committees).
- Increase in time allowed to establish a quorum at committee meetings.
- Introduction of a clear Standing Order setting out how Amendments are to be handled in a committee setting.

Further Review Required

22. As part of the various consultation exercises, there were a few areas of interest that arose that were, inherently, more complex. These matters are set out below, in brief – and again are summarised in the Table at Appendix 2.
23. Further work and consultation would have been required to bring forward a recommendation in these areas, which would have inevitably delayed progress on the proposals brought forward this day. As such, if Members wish for these matters to be pursued, further work will need to be undertaken in time for the next civic year.

24. Areas that Members may wish to explore further as part of a separate review are:

- Ward Committee composition and appointments;
- Composition of Policy and Resources Committee;
- Appointments process for the Chair, Deputy Chair and Vice Chairs of Policy and Resources Committee;
- The role of the Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee who acts, in many ways, as “Leader” of the Council.

25. Members may not feel that any of these require further attention. However, if they do, then it is proposed that a review be delivered in time for adoption for the 2026/27 civic year.

Options

26. Members have the following options available to them:

- A) Approve the recommendations and amendments, as presented;
- B) Discuss and make suggestions or amendments to the revised Standing Orders, before approving either by way of Delegated Authority or at the February meeting of Policy and Resources Committee;
- C) Approving some, but not all, amendments – seeking further work on those not approved this day;
- D) Reject the report in its entirety, seeking further work before a second consideration.

27. If Members select option D, it may still be possible to report the changes to the February meeting of this Committee, for onward consideration by the Court of Common Council in March 2025. However, this will be dependent upon the volume of additional consultation required.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – This review seeks to introduce revisions to the City’s Standing Orders, to provide efficiencies in the running of Court and Committee meetings; and improve transparency. As proposed, it is hoped that the amendments will help “Build on Brilliant Basics” and the provision of statutory duties to deliver for people; contributing to civic life both in the City and further afield; and delivering social mobility for all.

Financial implications – There are no direct financial implications in relation to this report.

Resource implications – Some of the changes will have minor additional resource implications, mainly for the Governance and Member Services Team, whereas others should seek to reduce resource implications. These are detailed in Appendix 2, where relevant. Overall, it is considered that proposals (as presented) can be absorbed into « business as usual ».

Legal implications – There is considerable case law in respect of how Local Authorities should transact its business (and thus some limitations on what changes can or cannot be introduced to the Standing Orders). Proposals have been checked alongside « Knowles on Local Authority Meetings, 8th Edition » ; proposals have also been reviewed by the Comptroller & City Solicitor. Should Members seek to introduce amendments at the Policy & Resources Committee meeting, officers will need to confer to ensure that they comply with case law. Members are, therefore, strongly encouraged to contact the report author with any questions or suggested amendments ahead of the meeting, so these implications can be fully mapped and communicated to Members in taking their decision.

Risk implications – There are no considerable risks associated with proposals. However, if amendments are proposed without notice, it may not be possible to fully inform Members of the wider implications of the change. This will need to be managed on a case by case basis at the meeting, with officers advising on each count. Where further work on implications is required, it is suggested that the Committee allow use of the delegated authority requested, or seek a further report in February 2025.

Equalities implications – Under the Equality Act 2010, all public bodies have a duty to ensure that when exercising their functions they have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and to take steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people and encourage people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low. The proposals contained in this report do not have any potential negative impact on a particular group of people based on their protected characteristics.

Climate implications – none.

Security implications – none.

Conclusion

28. Following six months of consultation, including opportunity to make written submissions, ten dedicated consultation sessions (in person and online), officer consultation, and a full discussion at Informal Court, this report presents amendments to the Standing Orders that, on balance, Officers believe to represent the majority position, and seek to provide improvements to the efficiency and transparency of the conduct of business of the Court of Common Council, its committees and sub-committees. If approved, these will take effect from April 2025, allowing officers and Members to familiarise themselves with the changes ahead of the new civic year.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Revised Standing Orders

Appendix 2 – Summary of Revisions to Standing Orders

Background Papers

[Standing Order Review 2024 – Policy and Resources Committee \(July 2024\)](#)

Polly Dunn

Assistant Town Clerk and Executive Director of Governance and Member Services