

Report – Policy and Resources Committee

Standing Order Review

To be presented on Thursday, 6th March 2025

*To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons
of the City of London in Common Council assembled.*

SUMMARY

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

The amendments contained within the 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.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members:

1. Approve the Standing Order revisions set out in Appendix 1 (and Addendums), summarised in Appendix 2, for adoption from 25 April 2025;
2. Note that, upon adoption by the Court of Common Council, the Town Clerk will develop a suite of supplementary guidance documents to the Standing Orders (e.g. Frequently Asked Questions, Glossary of Terms etc.);
3. Note that any consequential formatting changes (e.g. numbering) will be overseen by the Town Clerk, upon final approval; and
4. Note the matters where further review is required.

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. Whilst there are some explicit variations within the Court of Common Council's Standing Orders for non-Local Authority activities (e.g. for the City Bridge Foundation), they apply across all of the Court's responsibilities and powers.
3. 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.
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 formal meeting after the all-out Common Councillor elections.

Current Position

5. In broad terms, the scope for the Standing Order review commissioned by your Policy and Resources Committee focussed on those 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 2024. Whilst discussion at each session largely focussed on a specific theme, Members were encouraged at every opportunity to make any other observations that they felt were relevant to the wider review.
7. 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 2024. The meeting of the Informal Court was an extremely valuable exercise. There was general support for the changes, with some matters that, if pursued, would warrant further consideration and consultation.
8. At its meeting in January 2025, your Policy and Resources Committee discussed proposals and agreed to the revisions presented, subject to some amendments. In addition, further work was commissioned in respect of Sub-Committee appointments, which was subsequently presented back to the Committee in February. A delegated authority was granted to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee, to make any necessary revisions to the draft Standing Orders to give rise to any amendments proposed from these debates. These amendments have now been approved and feature within the Appendices.
9. Chief Officers were also written to, and their teams were invited to make suggestions.

10. 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.
11. 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 set out below.

Clarification of Existing Practice

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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, these vacancies 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. Footnotes have been added and, subject to adoption, the Town Clerk will produce supplementary guidance documents that will help facilitate Members in their understanding of the Standing Orders and how they work in practice.
15. 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.
16. Beyond this, 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".
17. 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”

18. There were a series of proposed changes where there was a divergence of opinion amongst wider Members and/or multiple solutions to the same concerns (and where the Court has more flexibility in its own arrangements). Your Committee has sought to recommend changes that balance various positions whilst adhering to general principles of good governance.

Further Review Required

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. Areas that Members identified as requiring a separate review are:

- Ward Committee composition and appointments;
- Composition of the Policy and Resources Committee;
- Role of the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee;
- Appointments process for the Chair, Deputy Chair and Vice Chairs of the Policy and Resources Committee

22. 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.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – This review seeks to introduce revisions to the City Corporation’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 Town Clerk to discuss

any amendments ahead of the meeting, so these implications can be properly considered ahead of debate.

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.

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

23. 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, your Policy and Resources Committee believes to represent the majority position. They 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 (and Addendums): Draft Revisions to the Standing Orders

Appendix 2: A Summary of changes to the Standing Orders

Background Papers

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

[Standing Order Review 2025 – Policy and Resources Committee \(January 2025\)](#)

[Draft Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee \(January 2025\)](#)

[Standing Order Review 2025 \(Sub-Committees\) – Policy and Resources Committee \(February 2025\)](#)

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 26th Day of January 2025.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Deputy Christopher Michael Hayward
Chairman, Policy and Resources Committee