



Report of the Chief Democratic Services Officer

General Purposes Committee

Date: 8th September 2009

Subject: Review of Call In Procedures

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. In January 2009 Council agreed to amend the Call In procedure rules, requiring that original signatures be used on the Call In Request Form. General Purposes Committee in recommending this change to Council asked that it be reviewed in six months.
2. The purpose of this report is to review the requirement to have original signatures on Call In request forms in the light of six months operational experience and the comments of Members identified in Paragraph 3.4.

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the requirement to have original signatures on Call In request forms in the light of six months operational experience and the comments of Members identified in Paragraph 3.4.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 In January 2009 Council agreed to amend the Call In procedure rules, requiring that original signatures be used on the Call In Request Form. When agreeing to recommend this change to Council, the General Purposes Committee resolved to review it in six months.
- 2.2 By way of a reminder, when this matter was first discussed some Members were concerned that requiring original signatures would inconvenience Members who had other commitments outside of the City, as a Member may not be able to provide a signature within the required time-scale. Concerns were also raised that the quality of Members' contributions to discussions would not change even if original signatures were required. Some Members also questioned why electronic signatures should not be accepted, as they were in other circumstances (on White papers, for example). However, other Members argued that requiring original signatures would help to avoid decisions being called In by Members who were not fully aware of the issues involved. There were also concerns about the possibility of Members' signatures being added to Call In Request Forms without the knowledge of the Member concerned.
- 2.3 To help the discussion Members saw research that demonstrated that the practice of requiring original signatures varies amongst Core Cities.

Core City	Procedure
Birmingham	Have never been asked to accept an electronic signature but if asked would want the original.
Newcastle	Allow electronic signatures.
Liverpool	Require original signatures on paper copies, however they would accept electronic signatures ONLY if they have been sent by that person through their individual email account (Not on behalf of them).
Bristol	Only accept original signatures.
Sheffield	Have not had this debate but would currently accept electronic signature.
Nottingham	Never had a Call In.
Manchester	Rules unclear but are likely to ask for an original signature.

3.0 Review of current arrangements

3.1 Since the adoption of the 'original signature rule' there have been four Call Ins. (as of July 2009). These were:

- Budget Action Plan Staffing Issues (9th April) – Single group Call In, (five signatures);
- Voice Recognition system (29th April) - Single group Call In, (five signatures);
- Supporting People (22nd May) Mixed group Call In, (two signatures from two groups required, five from three groups received); and
- ICT Refresh - Sports for the Future (5th August) - Single group Call In, (five signatures).

3.2 From the Scrutiny Unit's point of view there were no administrative issues faced in progressing these Call Ins in terms of delays or reported difficulties in obtaining signatures

3.3 In June the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development wrote to the Leaders of the five political groups, their Whips and all Scrutiny Chairs, inviting their views on the current arrangements.

3.4 The Administration Leaders have responded stating that their groups are supportive of the arrangements as they stand and feel that no further revisions of the procedures are required. This is also the position of the Leader of the Green group. Councillor Anderson, Chair of Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) has advised that he considers the arrangements to be working well and do not need amendment. No other responses were received.

4.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

4.1 The Council's Scrutiny arrangements are one of the key parts of the Council's governance arrangements. This review of Scrutiny Board procedure rules seeks to ensure that the arrangements continue to be efficient and relevant to the work of the Council.

5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

5.1 There are no legal or resource implications to the proposed amendments.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 The General Purposes Committee is requested to review the requirement to have original signatures on Call In request forms in the light of six months operational experience and the comments of Members identified in Paragraph 3.4.

Background Papers

Scrutiny Board Procedure Rules
Report to General Purpose Committee – 20th November 2008