

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Guidelines

At the beginning of each Council or Committee meeting 15 minutes (with a possible extension of 2 extra 15 minute periods) are set aside to allow members of the public to ask questions of Council or the Committee. Prior to the meeting, you are encouraged to register your intention to ask a question on the Public Question Time Submission Form. Hard copies of the form are also be provided in the Council Chambers or Committee Room.

How do I ask questions during Public Question Time?

1. When Public Question Time is opened, the presiding member will request people to come forward in the order they have registered. When called you are required to:
 - state your name and address; and
 - ask your question.
2. If you have several questions you will initially be allowed to ask a maximum of two questions and use a maximum of three minutes to ask and receive a response to your questions. This ensures an equal and fair opportunity is provided to all persons wishing to address Council or the Committee. If you have a question that is lengthy or complex and you have not provided it in writing, you will be asked to write it down and hand it to the Chief Executive Officer to ensure an accurate summary of the question can be included in the minutes of the meeting.
3. The presiding member will then determine who is to respond to your question. The presiding member may:
 - respond personally to the question asked;
 - refer the question to another member for a response;
 - refer the question to an employee (through the CEO) for a response;
 - take the question on notice; or
 - decide not to accept the question.
4. Once you have asked two questions the presiding member will enquire if you have any more questions. If you do, your request will be noted and placed at the end of the queue (if applicable) and you will be asked to resume your seat in the public gallery.
5. The next person on the list will then be called and the registration list is worked through until exhausted.
6. The presiding member will then call upon any other persons who did not register if they have a question (e.g., people may have arrived after the meeting started). When such people have asked their questions the presiding member may, if time permits, provide an opportunity for those who have already asked a question to ask further questions.
7. The presiding member declares Public Question Time closed at the expiration of the allocated time period or when there are no further questions.

Who can ask questions?

Any member of the public can ask questions, not just electors or people who live in the district.

What kind of questions can be asked?

During Ordinary meetings of Council, any questions affecting the operations of the local government may be asked. No response will be provided to questions that do not relate to a matter affecting the local government.

During Special meetings of Council only questions relating to the purpose of the meeting may be asked.

During Committee meetings only questions relating to the functions of the Committee may be asked.

What kind of questions cannot be asked?

If you provide a written question or attempt to verbally ask a question which is considered to be offensive, defamatory in nature or questioning the competency of staff or elected members, the presiding member will advise you that the question will not be considered and you may be invited to rephrase your question.

If you attempt to ask a question considered inappropriate, not in good faith or which relates to the personal affairs or actions of elected members or employees, the presiding member will rule your question out of order and it will not be recorded in the minutes.

Finally, the presiding member may refuse to accept questions relating to confidential matters, legal advice, legal proceedings or other legal processes, or questions that have been answered by earlier questions or at a previous meeting.

What happens to questions that require considerable research?

If a question is raised which requires considerable research then the presiding member may point out that a response would require a substantial commitment of the local government's resources and invite you to reconsider your request or refer the matter to the CEO for action following the meeting.

Can I make a statement instead of asking a question?

No. If you attempt to use question time to make statements rather than ask questions, you will be asked by the presiding member to "state your question" or you may be assisted in phrasing your question. However, if it is necessary that the question be prefaced by a statement in order to place the question in context, then the statement should be brief.

There is an opportunity for members of the public to make a public statement of maximum 3 minutes during the Deputations segment of the meeting.

What if I ask a question that does not comply with these procedures?

You will be ruled 'out of order' and your question will not be recorded in the minutes if you:

- ask a question that does not comply with these procedures;
- do not abide by a ruling or direction from the presiding member; or
- behave in a manner that is disrespectful of the presiding member, Council or Committee.