

10. Questions for the public

This text illustrates a process for public question time at council meetings. Current experience in local authorities suggest that half an hour is an appropriate length of time. Councils may wish to limit the time available for questions and replies (see Rule 11).

10.1 General

Members of the public may ask questions of [members of the executive *in executive arrangements*] [the leader of the council and any chairman of a policy committee *in alternative arrangements*] at ordinary meetings of the Council.

10.2 Order of questions

Questions will be asked in the order notice of them was received, except that the chairman may group together similar questions.

10.3 Notice of questions

A question may only be asked if notice has been given by delivering it in writing or by electronic mail to the [proper officer] no later than midday [n] days before the day of the meeting. Each question must give the name and address of the questioner and must name the member of the Council to whom it is to be put.

10.4 Number of questions

At any one meeting no person may submit more than [n] questions and no more than [n] such questions may be asked on behalf of one organisation.

10.5 Scope of questions

The [proper officer] may reject a question if it:

- is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the borough;
- is defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
- is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; or
- requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

10.6 Record of questions

The [proper officer] will enter each question in a book open to public inspection and will immediately send a copy of the question to the member to whom it is to be put. Rejected questions will include reasons for rejection.

Copies of all questions will be circulated to all members and will be made available to the public attending the meeting.

10.7 Asking the question at the meeting

The chairman will invite the questioner to put the question to the member named in the notice. If a questioner who has submitted a written question is unable to be present, they may ask the chairman to put the question on their behalf. The chairman may ask the question on the questioners behalf, indicate that a written reply will be given or decide, in the absence of the questioner, that the question will not be dealt with.

10.8 Supplemental question

A questioner who has put a question in person may also put one supplementary question without notice to the member who has replied to his or her original question. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply. The chairman may reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds in Rule 10.5 above.

10.9 Written answers

Any question which cannot be dealt with during public question time, either because of lack of time or because of the non-attendance of the member to whom it was to be put, will be dealt with by a written answer.

10.10 Reference of question to [the executive or] a committee

Unless the chairman decides otherwise, no discussion will take place on any question, but any member may move that a matter raised by a question be referred to [the executive or] the appropriate committee or sub-committee. Once seconded, such a motion will be voted on without discussion.