

Appendix 'H'

Guidance Notes on the Structure and Rules for the Public Having an Opportunity to Ask Questions at Council Meetings

Introduction

1. A fundamental aspect of the Council's modernised system is the opportunity for members of the public to be allowed to ask questions at Council meetings (full Council, not Scrutiny Commissions or Regulatory Boards apart from Planning).
2. Council meetings will be held at roughly 4-week intervals.
3. The public may attend unless and until the meeting decides to move into private session for legal reasons. One of the main differences from the previous system is the opportunity for the public to participate in the business of the meeting by asking questions relevant to the business of the Council at Council meetings.
4. Council meetings will continue to be chaired by The Mayor who shall rule on the admissibility of questions.

Public Question and Answer Sessions

5. Council agenda will include an item entitled "Public Questions".
6. A resident of the Borough shall give 5 clear working days' notice in writing to the Borough Secretary of any such question that he/she wishes to put to the Council except in the case of questions relating to urgent business not included or referred to in the Council agenda or any accompanying minutes when, with the consent of the Mayor, such a question may be put with only one day's notice having been given. 7 days' notice shall be required for a question relating to a joint authority.
7. No question shall exceed 100 words in length.
8. All questions submitted shall be read aloud by the Chief Executive and shall be responded to by the Mayor or the appropriate Cabinet Spokesperson, Scrutiny Commission Chairman or Regulatory Board Chairman without discussion but the person to whom a question has been put may decline to answer or may request that an answer be deferred to enable it to be provided by a more appropriate Member.
9. The questioner shall have a right to submit verbally one supplementary question, if desired, provided that it is directly related to the subject of the original question and that the supplementary question is of no more than one minute in duration.

10. The Mayor will determine the acceptability of a supplementary question.
11. Any such supplementary question shall be responded to by the appropriate Member but the person to whom a question has been put may decline to answer or may request that an answer be deferred to enable it to be provided by a more appropriate Member.
12. No resident shall be permitted to ask more than one question and one supplementary question at any meeting.
13. The question and answer session shall not exceed 30 minutes in duration. Any questions not dealt with shall stand adjourned to the next ordinary Council meeting or, if the questioner so wishes, shall be responded to in writing.
14. This procedure shall also apply to co-opted members of Area Forums who wish to ask questions relating to the minutes of their Forum meetings and to any co-opted members of other Council committees in respect of minutes of their meetings, such co-opted members having priority over the general public.