

Procedure for Public Speaking: Question Time

26/08/2022

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Members of the public have the right to ask questions at Question Time prior to full Council meetings. Time is set aside prior to ordinary Council meetings for the public to ask questions. This procedure explains the rights of the public to ask questions at Question Time.

If you would like any further information or have any queries, please contact:

Committee and Member Services
Rossendale Borough Council
The Business Centre
Futures Park
Bacup
Lancashire
OL13 0BB
Tel: 01706 252422
Email: democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk

Details of full Council Meetings

Council meetings are usually held in the Council Chamber and start at the end of Question Time, which usually starts at 6.30pm. Details of meeting dates, times and venues are publicised on the Council's website www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings; at the One Stop Shop, Futures Park, Bacup, or they can be obtained from Committee and Member Services.

Agenda papers

Agendas are usually published on the Council's website 5 clear days before the meeting. For a meeting on a Wednesday the agenda should be available for inspection on the preceding Tuesday evening. Some items of Council business are confidential and the information is not available to the public.

Question Time

Prior to ordinary Council meetings, members of the public will only be entitled to ask questions during Question Time. Public Question Time will normally last up to half an hour. Please note that you will have to attend in order to put your question.

What is the order of speaking at public question time?

Questions will be taken in the order they have been submitted.

What is the deadline for submission of written questions?

Written notification of questions must be received no later than 9.00am two days prior to Question Time.

Responsible Section/Team	Committee and Member Services	Version/Status	2
Responsible Author	Committee and Member Services Manager	Date Agreed / Agreed At	25/10/2022 SOD
Date last Amended	26/08/2022	Due for Review	September 2026

GUIDANCE

Who can ask a question?

Any person who lives or works in the borough or their representative. One person should act as spokesperson for a group with a common interest.

Do I need to give notice that I want to ask a question?

Yes, and you will need to submit your question in writing in advance by 9.00am two days prior to Question Time. Only one question from each person can be submitted.

What happens when I arrive?

You should arrive at least 10 minutes before the start of Question Time. Please make yourself known to the Committee Officer. This allows time for an explanation of the procedures. It is usual for items for which members of the public are attending to be taken early in the proceedings.

How long may I speak for?

A time limit of 3 minutes for asking a question applies.

How should I ask a question?

It is important to ask your question exactly as it has been submitted, so please ensure that all the important points are covered. Try and be brief and to the point. When invited to speak, begin by giving your name and whether you are speaking as an individual member of the public or as a representative of a group. Every question shall be put and answered without discussion. Please note that statements are not permitted.

Who will answer my question?

The Leader of the Council will determine who will answer a particular question. The answer may be given verbally or in writing.

Scope of questions

The Mayor/chairperson may reject a question if the following applies:-

- It is not a matter for which the Local Authority has a responsibility, or which affects the borough.
- It requires the disclosure of exempt or confidential information.
- It is defamatory, frivolous or offensive.
- It is substantially the same as a question which has been asked at Question Time or a meeting of the Council or its committees in the past six months.

What if I have submitted a question, but I am unable to attend?

If a questioner who has submitted a written question is not present, then a written response will be provided.

What if there is no time to ask my question, or my question can't be answered at the meeting?

You will be provided with a written response.

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Some questions are not allowed

You may not ask a question in furtherance of your own particular circumstances. These should be taken up with officers or councillors outside Question Time and the Council meeting. Nor may people ask about a matter where there is a right of appeal to the courts, tribunal or to a Government minister. You may not ask a question about the service of any person employed by the Council.

Do not make derogatory or defamatory statements. The Mayor/chairperson may disallow any question that, in their opinion, is improper, vexatious irrelevant or otherwise objectionable.

Conduct at meetings

Once the meeting has started you are not permitted to approach or engage with members or officers. Members of the public cannot take part in the debate or decision making and may not question members or disrupt the meeting.

The laws of slander are very complex and serious. If you say something defamatory in public about a person that is untrue, even if you believe it to be true, you may be at personal risk of legal action. You should very carefully consider any criticisms you wish to make about people when speaking at Question Time and committee meetings. The Mayor/chairperson can ask a speaker to stop speaking and/or leave if the speaker behaves inappropriately.

Do I have to stay for the full meeting?

If you have come to listen to a particular item, you are very welcome to stay for the meeting. If you do wish to leave, we ask that you do so quietly so as not to interrupt the proceedings.

When will the minutes of the meeting be published?

The minutes of meetings are usually available 4 working days after the meeting and agreed at the subsequent meeting

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