

15. Questions by Members of the Public

Members of the public may ask a question at all Ordinary Meetings of Full Council, Cabinet and committees. Such a question must be within the remit of the meeting, except that questions may not be asked at meetings of the Planning Committee, Appeals Committee, Licensing Committee or Appointment Committee that relate to items on the agenda for that meeting.

The total time set aside for such questions and answers at Full Council and Cabinet will be up to 15 minutes for previously submitted written questions, and a further period of up to 15 minutes for any oral questions submitted at the meeting.

For all other committees the maximum time for public questions (written and oral) will be 15 minutes.

No written question exceeding 150 words will be allowed. Questions will usually be answered by either the Leader or relevant Cabinet member, or another member as determined by the chairman.

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

No person may submit more than one written question at any one meeting, and no more than three questions may be asked on behalf of one organisation.

To guarantee a reply at the meeting, members of the public must deliver their question in writing or by email, to Democratic Services no later than two clear working days prior to the start of the meeting. Each question must give the name and address of the questioner. Any written question received by the deadline will receive a written response.

A question may be asked at the meeting without prior notice but in these circumstances, there is no guarantee that a full reply will be given.

Scope of questions

A question may be rejected if it:

- (a) is not about a matter for which the council has a responsibility, or which affects the Isle of Wight
- (b) is defamatory, frivolous or offensive
- (c) is not a question but a statement
- (d) relates to an individual or the questioner's own particular circumstances
- (e) is substantially the same question which has been put at a meeting in the past six months
- (f) requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information or
- (g) names or identifies individual service users, members of staff or members/staff of partner agencies
- (h) is not submitted within the requisite timeframe

Democratic Services will provide assistance and an advocacy service for members of the public wishing to submit written questions to council meetings. This service will provide objective advice on the structure and wording of questions and submit/ask the question on behalf of the member of the public should they wish it.

Record of written questions

Democratic Services will give a unique reference number to each written question received at least two clear working days prior to the start of the meeting and enter this number and the question in an electronic file open to public inspection. Rejected written questions will include reasons for rejection. Copies of all public written questions will be circulated to members at the meeting. Following the meeting, the answer will be recorded adjacent to the question in the electronic file. Minutes of the meeting will record who asked a question, the subject matter and the reference number of both the question and answer.

For the avoidance of doubt this rule does not apply to oral questions asked at the meeting.

Asking a written question at a meeting

The chairman will invite the questioner to put the written question to the member named in the notice, in the order in which the written questions were received. If a questioner who wishes to ask a question prefers, their local councillor can ask the question on their behalf.

If the questioner is not present, then the chairman will decide whether the question should be read out and answered at the meeting.

The chairman may refuse to permit any question that in their opinion would be inappropriate for the meeting.

A person who has submitted a written question will not also be able to submit an oral question at the same meeting.

Oral questions – Full Council and Cabinet

Members of the public wishing to ask an oral question at either Full Council or Cabinet should register their intention at the reception desk in advance of the meeting. The time for registering will be 30 minutes prior to the published start of the meeting up until 10 minutes prior to that meeting commencing.

They will then be given a form to complete with their name, town/village of residence, email or home address and the topic of the question (not the question in full, unless they wish to provide this). These forms will be consecutively numbered in the order submitted.

At the expiry of the 10 minutes prior to the start of the meeting, the forms will be collected and handed to the chairman in numbered order.

Up to 15 minutes will be allotted to deal with written public questions, and then up to a further 15 minutes will be allowed for questions submitted on the day (oral questions). For oral questions, the chairman will ask those who have registered an oral question (in the numbered order that they were registered) to put their question. As the subject matter is known at that stage, the chairman should indicate which member will reply.

Once all registered oral questions have been dealt with, if time permits and at the discretion of the chairman, any further oral questions may be put to the meeting by members of the public.

Once the defined period of time allowed for questions has passed then all unanswered oral questions fall (unless chairman exercises their discretion to extend the time).

No oral question will receive a written reply, unless the member responding indicates as such.

Oral questions – other committees

If time allows, the chairman will ask in the meeting if there are any oral questions from members of the public. People asking an oral question must state their name and place of residence. The chairman may ask for any oral question to be submitted in writing.

Minutes of all meetings will record who asked a question, the subject matter, the response and the member who responded. If the member is unable to provide a response at the meeting they may provide a written response at a later date.

Supplementary question

A questioner who has put a question (either written or oral) in person may also put one supplementary question without notice to the member who has replied to their 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 ‘Scope of questions’, above.

Written answers

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

Where a reply cannot be provided at the meeting and a written response is promised, then such a response will usually be provided within three weeks, or an explanation will be given at that time as to why it is taking longer to get the response and when a final response may be ready.