

# Public Question Time at Council Meetings



Revised January 2016

The Council thinks that its citizens should be able to raise important issues which may be of concern to the community, and it has established a Public Question Time.

**Public Question Time** will be a period set aside at each Council Meeting (*excluding the annual meeting and extraordinary meetings*) for members of the public to put questions or statements directly to the Council.

This leaflet tells you:

- What kind of questions or statements can and cannot be asked or made
- How questions or statements should be submitted
- What will happen at the Council meeting
- What will happen after the meeting

### **What kind of questions or statements can and cannot be asked or made?**

Generally, members of the public will be able to ask questions or make statements of no more than 100 words –

*"On any matter in relation to which the council has powers or duties or which affects the district".*

The Public Question Time, however, should not be used to bypass the ordinary processes of the council.

**Most issues can be resolved simply by contacting your own District Councillor or the council's officers.**

**Queries or complaints from individuals about council services they receive will therefore not be allowed unless the matter has first of all been raised with**

- the council's officers **or**
- the Ward Councillor **or**
- the relevant Committee of the Council

**To ensure that the system is not misused or abused, and to comply with legal limitations on information which the council may divulge, the following rules shall apply:**

1. Questions or statements relating to any item on the agenda for that Council meeting are not permitted.
2. An individual cannot ask questions or make statements more than six times per year.
3. No more than six questions or statements on the same subject per year are allowed.
4. The same question or statement cannot be asked or made more than once.
5. Questions or statements on matters which are exempt or confidential under the 1985 Access to Information Act are not permitted.
6. Questions or statements which are defamatory, frivolous or offensive are not allowed.
7. Questions and statements must be submitted in writing (emails and faxes are accepted) to the Chief Executive three clear working days before the Council meeting (excluding the day of the meeting) at the latest, i.e. normally by the end of Tuesday for a meeting on the following Monday.

**How should questions/statements be submitted?**

1. A question or statement must be accompanied by the name and address of the person submitting it (*and a day time telephone number if possible*).
2. If a question or statement is ineligible, the person submitting it will be advised of this before the meeting and given the reason. The content of questions or statements deemed ineligible will not be published and you will not be allowed to ask the question or make the statement during the Public Question Time.
3. If a question or statement is not submitted in time for the next Council meeting, it will automatically be submitted to the following meeting unless the person submitting it indicates otherwise.
4. The Chief Executive will send copies of the question or statement to the relevant Councillor(s) and officer(s).

**What will happen at the meeting?**

- Having submitted a question or statement and been told that it will be presented at the next meeting, you should then come to that meeting and put your question or statement in person. If you are unable to attend or you would feel more

comfortable, an officer will put your question or statement on your behalf.

- Copies of all eligible questions and statements will be circulated at, or prior to, the meeting to which they are to be put.
- At the invitation of the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of Council, you may then read out the question or statement and, if you wish, speak for a maximum of three minutes by way of explanation. To ensure that questions and statements are dealt with fairly, persons will be invited to address the Council in the order in which they submitted their question or statement. If you submit more than one for a particular meeting, others will be given the chance to speak before you can put your subsequent question(s)/statement(s).
- You may only use photographs or plans or circulate supporting documents provided a copy was submitted with your question/statement.
- You may only, however, put the question which has been submitted and you will not be permitted to raise other matters or make a speech.
- As the maximum amount of time allowed for each question and answer will be six minutes, it would be advisable to be brief. The longer you take to introduce your question, the less time will be available to answer it.

If the question is eligible, it will be answered as fully as is possible at the meeting by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the relevant Committee or, in some cases, by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of Council itself. Your Ward Councillor(s) may also be invited to speak on the issue but no further debate will take place.

- On hearing the reply, you will have the right to ask one brief supplementary question, without any elaboration.
- Eligible statements will not normally receive a response. Where there is no response, you will not have the right to speak further. Where a response is given by either the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the relevant Committee, the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of Council or your Ward Councillor(s), you will have the right to make a brief supplementary statement.
- You may not question or seek to involve yourself in issues being raised by other participants.
- Any questions or statements which cannot be dealt with in the 30 minutes allowed for Public Question Time will be given

priority at the next Council meeting unless the persons who submitted them indicate otherwise.

- The reason(s) for disallowing any questions and statements submitted for a particular meeting will be publicly stated at that meeting.

### **What will happen after the meeting?**

The content of your question or statement will be published in the minutes of the meeting together with any response given and a copy will be forwarded to you in your preferred format.

#### **Note:**

**The Chairman of the Council has absolute discretion regarding the interpretation of this scheme and its temporary suspension, variance or withdrawal at a particular meeting if this would be conducive to the debate or in the event that it becomes, or threatens to become, disruptive to the conduct of the meeting or the proper and lawful exercise of the council's statutory powers and duties.**

# Public Question Time

## Checklist

### **Is it a matter you should first of all have taken up with the council's officers or your local Councillor?**

If it is, it will not be dealt with at the Public Question Time, so contact the local office in the first instance.

If you are not satisfied, speak to your local Councillor.

### **Have you asked the right question or made the right statement?**

Remember that you can only put the question or statement you submitted, and you may not make a speech, so make sure you've written the question or statement in such a way so as to make your point. This is particularly important in relation to questions if you are to obtain the information you are seeking.

Remember to indicate which is your first question/statement if you submit more than one for a particular meeting. There may be insufficient time to take the other(s) if a number of people have indicated that they wish to speak.

### **Have you checked the date of the next Council meeting?**

Ensure that your question arrives in time and that you know exactly where to go and when.

### **Where are Council meetings held?**

Council meetings are generally held at 7:00pm on Monday evenings in the Council Chamber at The Guildhall, Gainsborough.

## **Would you like more information or advice?**

If so, contact:

**Democratic Services  
West Lindsey District Council  
Guildhall  
Marshall's Yard  
Gainsborough  
Lincolnshire  
DN21 2NA**

**Telephone: 01427 676594/5**

**email: [committeeadmin@west-lindsey.gov.uk](mailto:committeeadmin@west-lindsey.gov.uk)**

**The Public Question Time described in this leaflet is seen by the council as a way of improving its services to the public and of enhancing the democratic process. I hope that you will take advantage of the opportunities it affords.**

**The council also has arrangements in place for participating in the Planning Committee and other Committee meetings. Other leaflets are available explaining these schemes.**

### **Other Leaflets in this Series:**

Public Participation at Committee Meetings

and

Public Participation at Planning Committee Meetings

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