

September 2024



Public Questions to the Council

Preamble

The public and press have the right to attend meetings of the Parish Council and its Committees, to observe business being conducted. Exceptionally, confidential matters will be reserved to *in camera* sessions.

Dialogue between the Council and the public is not permitted without the Chairman temporarily suspending the meeting.

This guidance was initially drawn up for meetings held as a gathering in public. Since April 2020, it has only been possible to hold virtual meetings, for example, via Zoom. The procedure for public questions remains fundamentally the same, as laid out below.

Anyone desirous of putting questions for consideration by the Council has two options.

Option 1 – correspondence

The Clerk will acknowledge receipt of questions received by post or email and advise via the agenda under 'correspondence received'. Should several writers pose a similar question, they may be combined into a group question.

In order for such a question to be cited as an agenda item, the Clerk must receive questions at least 48 hours before the latest permissible publication date of the agenda. For meetings scheduled for Thursday, the agenda must be published no later than the previous Friday. This means questions must be with the Clerk by the previous Tuesday.

These notification times will be earlier if there are any intervening public holidays.

The first advantage of this option is that being an agenda item, Council can consider and agree a minuted response.

The second advantage of this option is that giving adequate advance notice will secure the better chance of the Council researching and responding at the subsequent meeting. The Council should, if an answer is not possible at the meeting, undertake to provide a written response within 10 working days following the meeting or such other period as may be mutually agreed.

Option 2 – at the meeting

There is a space in the agenda for 'Public questions: no decisions made'. The slot allocated in the agenda will depend on a number of factors. Members of the public are free to join or leave the meeting at any time and to do so in a manner that does not cause a distraction.

In order to preserve fairness and good order, the Chairman will determine who is called upon, in which order and how often.

Public Questions will normally be limited to 15 minutes, during which period a person can raise one issue on which they should deliver their question in 3 minutes. A short response will permit 3 or 4 questions to be aired. The Clerk will remind the Chairman as the limit of time approaches. The Chairman may exercise discretion to extend the period to cater for more questions. Further participation by the original questioner will also be at the Chairman's discretion.

Since no decisions can be made there will be no debate. Upon direction of the Chairman, the Council will move on to the next agenda item.

Answers may be given orally by the Chairman or nominated Councillor. If the question cannot be answered on the spot, a formal response will follow, but no later than the next meeting.

The main disadvantage of this option is that having not given the minimum 3 clear working days notice, the Council cannot render an immediate decision.

This policy was reviewed and adopted by the Council in September 2024. All Council policies are subject to annual review but at a shorter interval if circumstances require.