

Public Question Time

In Littlehampton, we want people to be involved in the democratic process, be it at the ballot box, through consultation or by enabling members of the public to ask questions at Council and Committees. Each meeting of the Full Council and each of the Committees will have a Public Question Time immediately following the approval of the previous meetings minutes.

Asking Questions at Full Council

Public Question Time lasts for a maximum of 15 minutes at the start of each meeting, when members of the public can come along and put their views and questions to elected Councillors. These meetings usually start at 6.30 pm and are advertised on the public notice boards around the Town. A calendar of meeting dates is available at the Council Offices, the Library, the Civic Centre and other public buildings in the Town. They are also available, with minutes and agendas on the Council's Web site, www.littlehampton-tc.gov.uk.

To ask a question, all a member of the public has to do is to raise their hand to indicate to the Mayor that they would like to ask a question. The Mayor will then call each questioner in turn and deal with the issues raised. We will attempt to deal with all issues raised at the meeting, but sometimes more work may be required. In these cases a written answer will be provided. You will also be allowed to ask one follow-up question if you need to.

At Council, your questions can be about any issue relating to the work of the Council, not just the Agenda items for that meeting.

Asking Questions at Committee

The system operates in much the same way as for Full Council, except that the questions should only relate to matters within the scheme of delegated powers of the Committee. The matters should be broad issues rather than cases that affect one individual alone. The exception to this rule would be at the Planning and Transportation Committee where individuals might wish to oppose or support a planning application because of the impact that it has on them or their property.

Number of and Time Limits on Questions

At any one meeting no person may submit more than two questions and no more than two such questions may be asked on behalf of one organisation. Unless the Chair otherwise specifies, each speaker will be limited to 2 minutes in which to ask the question or questions. Subject to the Chair's discretion, there will be an overall limit of 15 minutes devoted to Public Questions.

Scope of Questions

The Chair may reject a question if it:

- Is not about a matter for which the Council (or Committee) has a responsibility or which affects the Town.
- Is defamatory, frivolous or offensive.
- Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at the meeting of the Council (or Committee) in the past 6 months or
- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

Supplemental Questions

A questioner who has asked a question may also put one supplementary question. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply. The Chair may reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds set out above.

Written Answers

Any question which cannot be dealt with during Public Question Time, either because of lack of time or because of the information not being available to give a full response, will be dealt with by way of a written response. In these circumstances, the member of the public should leave their name, address and details of the question with the Clerk. The question and response will be incorporated in an appendix to the minutes of that meeting.

Matters to be Excluded from Public Questions

Questions shall not be heard which relates to:

1. An individual's personal circumstances.
2. An individual or the questioners pecuniary circumstances.
3. A planning application (other than at the Planning and Transportation Committee).
4. A matter which is not the responsibility of the Council or that particular Committee.
5. A matter that the Committee or Council may have to determine in a quasi-judicial capacity
6. A matter which is the subject of legal proceedings or an appeal to a tribunal or to a Government Minister
7. The appointment, promotion, dismissal, salary, superannuation or conditions of service or the conduct of an individual employed by the Council or the conduct of a Member of the Council
8. Any other matter within paragraphs 1 – 15 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("Exempt" Information).

Disorderly Conduct

These provisions have been incorporated within the Standing Orders of the Town Council and therefore the relevant Standing Order (Standing Order 69 refers) applies. Under these provisions, if a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of any meeting or behaves inappropriately, the Chair may, after a warning, order that

he/she be removed from the meeting. In these circumstances, the Chair will adjourn the meeting whilst a member of the public is removed from the building. Furthermore, the use of audio and video recording equipment by members of the public shall not be allowed without the consent of the Chair.

Written Questions

Some research may be required to enable a comprehensive answer to be given to your question. If you think this is likely, it is suggested you submit the questions in writing, at least 1 working day in advance of the meeting. Every effort will be made in these circumstances to obtain the answer for you, so that this can be reported at the meeting. You will also receive a written response.

You should write to:

The Town Clerk, Manor House, Church Street, Littlehampton, West Sussex BN17 5EW

or email to: lrc@littlehampton-tc.gov.uk