

SCHEME FOR PUBLIC QUESTIONS AT FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the Scheme for Public Questions at full Council is to enable a Member of the public with a connection to the Rushmoor area to ask a Member of the Cabinet or Chair of Committee, a question on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties, or which affects the Borough.

A maximum period of 15 minutes will be allocated for public questions on the Council agenda.

The Scheme is available to:

- Anyone who lives or works within the area of Rushmoor
- The owner of a business or property which is physically located within the Borough
- A representative of any local group or organisation, which is associated with and operates within the Borough.

Except those who have a close and direct family relationship to an Elected Member on the Council.

A person wishing to ask a question will be required to provide their qualifying address, work or organisation details.

PROCESS

- 1.1 A member of the public may ask questions of the Leader of the Council, any Member of the Cabinet or the Chair of any Committee on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties, or which affects the Borough.
- 1.2 A member of the public is limited to asking one question at any meeting of the Council. No more than one question can be asked on behalf of any organisation or body at any Council meeting. No public questions may be asked at the Annual Council meeting.
- 1.3 No question shall exceed 100 words in length.
- 1.4 The full question must be sent, in writing, to the Corporate Manager – Democracy, via email to committeeservices@rushmoor.gov.uk, to be received no later than 5pm on the fourth working day prior to the day of the meeting. (For the avoidance of doubt, if a meeting were to be held on a Thursday evening, the deadline would be 5pm on the Friday of the preceding week). No questions from the public will be allowed where the requisite notice has not been given.

- 1.5 For questions that are accepted, the Corporate Manager – Democracy will agree with the questioner whether they wish to be named at the Council Meeting, or whether they wish to be referred to in a more anonymised way e.g. 'a resident from X road in X ward'
- 1.6 All public questions, whether accepted or refused (see grounds for refusal below) shall be notified to all Members in advance of the Council Meeting for information.
- 1.7 The Corporate Manager – Democracy shall maintain the record of public questions, which will be made available on the Council's website. The record will include answers for questions accepted, and the reason(s) rejected for the questions refused. The record will indicate where questions/answers are submitted by the same person(s)/groups/organisations.

Grounds for refusal of a Public Question

- 1.8 The Managing Director in consultation with the Mayor may reject a question for Council for inclusion on the agenda if in their opinion:
 - it does not relate to a matter for which the Council has responsibility or does not affect the Borough or its residents, communities or businesses,
 - it is defamatory, frivolous, vexatious, or offensive,
 - it refers to legal proceedings taken or anticipated by or against the Council
 - it is substantially the same as a question or statement which has been put to a meeting of Council within the previous 6 months,
 - it requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information, or
 - it would more appropriately be responded to by the Council under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, or the Data Protection Act 1998 as amended
 - Allegations against individual councillors or officers
- 1.9 The questioner will be advised the reason why a question has been refused for the agenda.

Responding to Questions at the Council Meeting

- 1.10 The Corporate Manager – Democracy will prepare a list of tabled questions in the order in which they have been received.
- 1.11 The Leader of the Council and the appropriate Member(s) will be advised in advance of the question that has been submitted for their response.
- 1.12 At the Council Meeting, questions will be taken in the order in which they were received by the Corporate Manager – Democracy, except that the Mayor may group similar questions or statements together.

- 1.13 Public questions may be read out by the Mayor on behalf of the questioner, or may be asked by the member of the public at the meeting when invited to do so by the Mayor.
- 1.14 The response to a public question will take the form of a verbal response with a written answer recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 1.15 Verbal responses at the Council Meeting should aim to be succinct to accommodate multiple questions to be dealt with within the 15 minutes allocated for public questions.
- 1.16 The Mayor will be responsible for the conduct of public questions at the Council Meeting, allowing a supplementary question where appropriate, for example for clarification or something misunderstood.
- 1.17 The Mayor's ruling on the conduct of public questions will be final.