



## Public Question Time Guidelines

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the Public Question Time Guidelines is to ensure that all public questions can be answered within the allocated timeframe for Public Question Time, and prevent unhelpful debate.

Council has provided the opportunity for any member of the public to submit a question relating to any issues in which Council has a direct interest or responsibility to the Ordinary Meeting of Council held on the fourth Thursday of every month. Wherever possible, Council will answer the public questions as part of the Ordinary Council Meeting.

### **Protocol:**

There is a need to cover some simple protocols as each meeting may involve people attending for the first time:

1. Public Question time is specifically available for questions from residents, ratepayers, businesses or other interested party.
2. Questions relating to specific Planning Permit Applications (or other Statutory Planning matters) should be stated in writing as part of Council's Planning Application process. These matters will not be considered during Public Question Time.
3. A maximum of one question will be accepted from any one person per Council meeting. If multiple questions are asked about one or more topics, the first question will be answered during Public Question Time and subsequent questions will be automatically taken on notice and responded to in writing. Where a question is taken on notice, a reply shall be mailed consistent with the timelines in Council's Customer Service Charter.
4. It is recommended that questions be limited to 75 words and may include a short preamble (up to 150 words).
5. The submitted Questions will be considered in turn. Questions received for Public Question Time will be read out by the submitter, the Mayor or nominated Councillor Chairperson. Copies of Public Questions will be provided to the Gallery.
6. A maximum of 20 minutes has been allocated for answering all questions in accordance with these guidelines.
7. Questions must be written and received by the Chief Executive Officer prior to 3.00pm on the day of the Ordinary Council meeting. Questions received after this time will be treated as correspondence and a written response provided consistent with Council's Customer Service Charter. Questions can be lodged online, via email, via post or in person by completing a Public Question Time Form.
8. The person asking the question must be in attendance at the meeting for the answer to be read out at the meeting. If the person is not in attendance a written response will be forwarded to them consistent with Council's Customer Service Charter.
9. The Mayor or Chairperson may disallow any question which is considered to:
  - Relate to a matter beyond the power or duties of Council;
  - Be defamatory, indecent, offensive, abusive, irrelevant, trivial or objectionable in language or nature;
  - Be confidential in nature or of legal significance;
  - Be repetitive of a question already answered, whether at the same or any earlier meeting;

- Be aimed to embarrass a Councillor or member of Council staff;
  - Relate to personnel matters;
  - Relate to the personal hardship of any resident or ratepayer;
  - Relate to proposed developments or legal advice;
  - Relate to matters affecting the security of Council property;
  - Relate to any other matter which Council considers would prejudice the Council or any person;
  - Breach the local law;
  - Have already been asked in writing of a Councillor or a member of Council staff, or if the person submitting the question has already received a written response to the question from a Councillor or a member of Council staff.
10. If the Mayor or Chairperson has determined that the question shall not be read to the meeting:
- He or she must advise the meeting accordingly; and
  - The question shall be made available to Councillors.
11. Answers to questions shall be given immediately, if possible, or taken on notice if an on-the-spot answer is not available. (Where a question is taken on notice, a written response will be forwarded to them consistent with Council's Customer Service Charter).

### **Process for responding to Public Questions and the Role of the Mayor or Chairperson**

1. The Mayor or Chairperson will ascertain that the person asking the question is present in the gallery. If the person is not in attendance a response will be provided in writing consistent with Council's Customer Service Charter.
2. If the person is in the public gallery, the submitter, the Mayor or Chairperson will read the question. The Mayor or Chairperson has the discretion to seek clarification of the question if deemed necessary.
3. The Mayor or Chairperson will either answer the question or nominate the relevant Portfolio Councillor or officer to provide the answer to the question.
4. It is important to note that the Council Meeting is a legal forum for Council decision making. It is not an arena for community and Council debate through Public Question Time. Therefore the person who submitted the question is not permitted to enter into debate with or directly question the Mayor, Councillors or Council officers.
5. All questions and answers provided in Public Question Time shall be recorded in the Public Minutes of the Council Meeting. For public questions taken on notice, the question and answer be included in ADJUNCT TO 5.1 – PUBLIC QUESTION TIME STATUS UPDATE, for the following Ordinary Council Meeting agenda.
6. Supplementary information provided with a Public Question will not be recorded in the minutes.

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***26 October 2017 Ordinary Council Meeting***