

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Public Speaking Scheme (Physical Meetings)

1. General

1.1 Any person who lives, works, studies or owns or occupies property in the District, may, at the discretion of the Chair, ask a question or make a statement at ordinary meetings of:

(a) the Council; and

(b) the Cabinet, a committee or a sub committee where the question or statement falls within the remit of that body (other than regulatory committees, sub committees and panels)

in accordance with this scheme.

1.2 The Chair shall have discretion to permit any other person to ask a question or make a statement in accordance with this scheme where they are satisfied that such person is affected by, or has a legitimate interest in, the business of the Council, Cabinet, relevant committee or sub committee, as appropriate (for example, representatives of partner organisations).

1.3 At the beginning of each ordinary meeting, a period of up to 15 minutes shall be allowed for public questions, statements and responses. The Chair shall have discretion to extend this period.

1.4 Questions may be directed to the Chair, the Leader, a Cabinet member or the Chair of any committee.

1.5 Where the question or statement relates to an item of business included on the agenda for the meeting, the Chair shall have discretion to take the public speaking at that part of the agenda, rather than during the public speaking period at the beginning of the meeting.

2. Order of speaking

- 2.1. Questions and statements shall be asked in the order in which notice of them was received, except that the Chair may group together similar questions or statements

3. Notice of request to speak

- 3.1 Members of the public wishing to speak at a meeting shall give notice in writing, or by email, to the Council's Democratic Services team at least three clear working days before the meeting and shall provide:

- (a) The name, address and contact details of the person wishing to speak.
- (b) The name of the organisation, if speaking on their behalf.
- (c) Details of the question to be asked or statement to be made.
- (d) The councillor to whom a question is to be put.

- 3.2 The Chair may permit a question or statement if shorter notice is given, at their discretion.

4. Number of questions and statements

- 4.1 At any one meeting, no person shall submit more than one question or statement, but one supplementary question or statement may be made at the meeting (see paragraph 7 below). More than one question or statement shall not be submitted on behalf of any organisation.

5. Scope of questions or statements

- 5.1 The Chair, having regard to the advice of the proper officer, may reject a question or statement if it:

- (a) is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the district;
- (b) is not a matter which falls within the remit of the Cabinet, committee or sub committee, as appropriate;

- (c) is vexatious, defamatory, frivolous, discriminatory, offensive or otherwise inappropriate;
 - (d) is substantially the same as a question or statement which has been put at the meeting or a meeting of the Council (or Cabinet, committee or sub committee, as appropriate) in the past six months;
 - (e) raises issues about the competence or performance of a councillor or officer;
 - (f) requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information;
 - (g) relates to a planning or licensing application;
 - (h) relates to any matter where there is already an existing right of appeal or a separate complaints process;
 - (i) refers to a matter which is, or may be, the subject of legal proceedings.
- 5.2 The Chair shall have the discretion to limit the length of preamble or other background information supplied with a question or statement.

6. Speaking at the meeting

- 6.1 The Chair will invite the speaker to put the question, or to read out their statement. If a speaker is unable to be present, they may ask the Chair to put the question or read out the statement on their behalf or may appoint a representative to do so. In the case of a question, the Chair may ask the question on the questioner's behalf, indicate that a written reply will be given, normally within five working days, or decide, in the absence of the questioner, that the question will not be dealt with.
- 6.2 Each speaker shall have a maximum of three minutes in which to ask their question or to make a statement. The Chair may curtail any preamble given before the question is asked. The public speaker shall not participate in any discussion and shall not be entitled to vote.
- 6.3 Where there are a number of speakers wishing to speak for or against an issue, they shall have a total of three minutes to speak and therefore they will be encouraged to appoint a spokesperson.

- 6.4 The response to the question shall normally be given by the councillor to whom the question is put, save that the Leader of the Council or another cabinet member, may respond in the case of a question put to a cabinet member. Where a substantive answer cannot be provided at the meeting, a written answer may be given within the timescales specified in paragraph 8.

7. Supplementary question or comment

- 7.1 A questioner who has put a question in person may also put one supplementary question without notice to the member who has replied to their original question. A supplementary question shall arise directly out of the original question or the reply.
- 7.2 A speaker who has made a statement may make a supplementary comment without notice not exceeding 1 minute in length. A supplementary comment shall arise directly out of the original statement.
- 7.3 The Chair may reject a supplementary question or comment on any of the grounds in paragraph 5.1 above.

8. Written answers

- 8.1 Any question which cannot be dealt with during public speaking time shall be dealt with by a written answer. Written answers shall be circulated to the questioner, normally within five working days of the meeting, and shall be included as an appendix to the minutes.

9. Reference of question by Council to the Cabinet or a committee

- 9.1 If a substantive answer cannot be given at the meeting of the Council, the Chair may refer the question to the Cabinet or a committee.
- 9.2 Discussion shall take place on a question or statement only at the invitation of the Chair, but any member may move that a matter raised by a question or statement be referred to the Cabinet or the appropriate committee. Once seconded, such a motion shall be voted on without discussion.

10. Authority of the Chair

10.1 The Chair may vary or suspend the operation of this procedure in advance or during the meeting if they consider:

- (a) that it is necessary to do so for the purpose of maintaining order at the meeting; or
- (b) that it is convenient and conducive to the despatch of business to do so.

11. Public participation at Planning Committee

11.1 Members of the public shall be entitled to address the Planning Committee in accordance with a scheme agreed by the committee and as amended from time to time.

12. Public participation at Licensing Committee

12.1. Where a public hearing is being conducted by the Licensing Committee, or its sub committees or panels, public participation shall be conducted in accordance with the separate procedure agreed by the committee for such hearings and as amended from time to time.

(Note: this scheme applies to public speaking at Council, Cabinet and committee meetings held with members and the public attending in person. A separate public speaking scheme applies to meetings held remotely. Please contact democratic.services@scams.gov.uk for more details.