



Procedure for Public Speaking: Cabinet Meetings

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Cabinet Speaking Procedures

Members of the public have the right to ask questions at Cabinet meetings on items listed on the agenda for that particular meeting. Time is set aside at the beginning of the Cabinet meetings for public to ask questions. This procedure explains the rights of the public to ask questions at Cabinet meetings.

If you would like any further information or have any queries, please contact:

Executive and Democratic Services

Rossendale Borough Council

The Business Centre

Futures Park

Bacup

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Details of Cabinet Meetings

Cabinet meetings are usually held in the Council Chamber and usually start at 6.30pm. Details of meeting dates, times and venues are publicised on the Council's website www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings; at the Customer Service Hub, Futures Park, Bacup, or they can be obtained from Executive and Democratic Services.

Agenda papers

Agendas are usually published on the Council's website 5 clear working days before the meeting. For a meeting on a Wednesday the agenda should be available for inspection on the preceding Tuesday evening. Some items of Council business are confidential and the information is not available to the public. For example, information likely to reveal the identity of an individual, or information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). This list is not exhaustive and further details can be found in the Council's Constitution.

Public Question Time

At Cabinet meetings, members of the public will only be entitled to ask questions during the public question time item on the agenda, and not as each agenda item is taken. Questions must be about items listed on the agenda for that particular meeting. Public question time will normally last up to half an hour, and this is the only point in the meeting where members of the public are able to ask a question. Please note that you will have to attend the meeting in order to put your question to the Cabinet.

What is the order of speaking at public question time?

Questions submitted in advance of the meeting will be taken first in the order that they have been submitted.

What is the deadline for submission of written questions?

Written notification of questions must be received no later than 12 noon one clear working day prior to the meeting.

GUIDANCE

Who can ask a question?

Any person who lives or works in the borough or their representative. One person should act as spokesperson for a group with a common interest.

Do I need to give notice that I want to ask a question?

No, but it will help the Council prepare an answer to your question if you do submit it in advance.

What happens when I arrive?

You should arrive at the meeting at least 10 minutes before the start of the meeting. Please make yourself known to the committee officer. This allows time for an explanation of the procedures. It is usual for items for which members of the public are attending to be taken early in the proceedings.

How long may I speak for?

A time limit of 3 minutes for asking a question applies, though this may be extended if the chairperson agrees. Please note that only one question from each person can be submitted.

How should I ask a question?

It is useful to prepare notes in advance to ensure that all the important points are covered. Try and be brief and to the point. Begin by giving your name and whether you are speaking as an individual member of the public or as a representative of a group. Every question shall be put and answered without discussion. Please note that statements are not permitted.

Who will answer my question?

The chairperson will decide who will answer the question. The answer may be given verbally or in writing. The chairperson has discretion to allow a follow up question.

Scope of questions

The chairperson may reject a question if the following applies:

- It is not a matter for which the Local Authority has a responsibility.
- It requires the disclosure of exempt or confidential information.
- It is defamatory, frivolous or offensive.
- It is substantially the same as a question which has been asked at a meeting of the Council or its committees in the past six months.

What if I have submitted a question, but I am unable to attend?

If a questioner who has submitted a written question is not present, then a written response will be provided.

What if there is no time to ask my question, or my question can't be answered at the meeting?

This is unlikely, however if this occurs you may leave a written question with the Committee Officer. If your question requires further research and cannot be answered at the meeting, then your question will be answered in writing after the meeting. Questions will normally be answered within 10 working days.

Some questions are not allowed

You may not ask a question in furtherance of your own particular circumstances. These should be taken up with officers or councillors outside of the meeting. Nor may people ask about a matter where there is a right of appeal to the courts, tribunal or to a Government minister. You may not ask a question about the service of any person employed by the Council.

Do not make derogatory or defamatory statements. The chairperson may disallow any question that, in their opinion, is improper, vexatious irrelevant or otherwise objectionable.

Conduct at meetings

Once the meeting has started you are not permitted to approach or engage with members or officers, or distribute or display any additional information. No campaign materials or banners are permitted in the meeting or within the Council premises. Members of the public cannot take part in the debate or decision making and may not question members or disrupt the meeting.

The laws of slander are very complex and serious. If you say something defamatory in public about a person that is untrue, even if you believe it to be true, you may be at personal risk of legal action. You should very carefully consider any criticisms you wish to make about people when speaking at Council and committee meetings. The chairperson can ask a speaker to stop speaking and/or leave if the speaker behaves inappropriately.

Do I have to stay for the full meeting?

If you have come to listen to a particular item, you are very welcome to stay for the rest of the meeting. If you do wish to leave, we ask that you do so quietly so as not to interrupt the proceedings.

When will the minutes of the meeting be published?

The minutes of meetings are usually available 4 working days after the meeting and agreed at the subsequent meeting.

Chairperson's discretion

The chairperson shall decide all questions on the procedures of the Cabinet meeting where not already provided for in the Constitution and committee procedure rules. This includes the interpretation of these speaking procedures. The ruling of the chairperson shall be final and not open to discussion.