

# Public speaking rights

## **1. *Public speaking rights at Council meetings and committees***

Set out below is the scheme that allows members of the public to speak at Cambridge City Council meetings.

If you have any questions on the scheme, please contact the Council's Committee Section at The Guildhall, email [democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk)

### **To which bodies does the right to speak apply?**

Meetings of the full Council, all committees, sub-committees and working parties; with the exception of:

- Planning Committee (see link to guidance: [public-speaking-rights-at-planning-committee-city.pdf](#)) and Licensing Sub-Committees and Taxi Licensing Sub-Committees, which have their own schemes for public speaking rights;
- Any working parties which are not open to the public;
- The Employment Appeals Sub-Committee

References in this scheme to the Chair shall be read as referring to the Cabinet or Cabinet Member.

### **Is it a right to ask questions or to make statements?**

Both.

### **How should questions or statements be addressed?**

At Council meetings, to the Chair of the relevant committee, or to the relevant Cabinet Member, as determined by the Mayor. At Committee meetings etc., to the Chair of the meeting or to the appropriate Cabinet Member if it relates to an Executive function. However, in both cases, the Chair or Cabinet Member may invite another member or an officer to respond.

For the benefit of Councillors and others, speakers should begin by saying who they are, if they are speaking for themselves or a group/organisation and if the latter an indication of how many people are involved.

**Are questions and/or statements confined to matters on the agenda or permitted on all matters within the Committee's (or other body's) areas of responsibility?**

Questions may be asked, and statements may be made, in respect of all matters within the Committee's or other body's areas of responsibility.

**Is there a requirement for advance notification of a wish to speak or ask a question?**

All questions must be submitted in writing in full by noon two working days before the date of the meeting e.g. noon on Tuesday for a Thursday meeting.

With Extraordinary Meetings, questions will only be taken on the single item of business for which the extraordinary meeting has been called.

**Are there time limits?**

Yes. The question submitted will be published on the meeting website before the meeting is held and it will not be read out. The Councillor will reply to the question (up to two minutes). The person who submitted the question may ask a supplementary (up to one minute). The Councillor may answer the supplementary (up to two minutes).

There is an overall time limit for public question time of 30 minutes. Each limit is extendable at the Chair's discretion.

**Are there rules about the nature of questions and statements?**

The scheme includes the following restrictions:

- Questions and statements should not contain offensive or defamatory expressions;
- Questions and statements should not relate to the conduct of individual Council employees or to human resources matters (eg disciplinary proceedings or grievances);
- Questions and statements should not divulge confidential or exempt information.

The Chair or Cabinet Member may refuse to reply to a question, and may refuse to refer the question to another member or to an officer at his/her discretion. Examples of circumstances in which it might be appropriate to decline to reply to a question include:

- Where an answer would involve divulging confidential or exempt information. (In appropriate cases, a written response may be possible with the consent of individuals whose personal information is being protected);
- Where the question concerns actual or potential legal proceedings involving the Council;

- Where responding to a question would involve a disproportionate use of resources in compiling an answer;
- Where there has been insufficient time to research an answer before the meeting.

The Chair or Cabinet Member may refuse to permit a question or a statement if it (or something similar) has already been put or made to another meeting of a Council committee or other body. The Chair may also discourage repetition and limit rights of address if more than one member of the public wishes to make a similar point. The Chair may determine the order in which questions and statements may be put.

### **When in the meeting are questions or statements made?**

This is left to the discretion of the Chair but, ordinarily, questions and statements will be dealt with at the beginning of the meeting. However, where a statement or a question relates to a matter on the agenda it may be appropriate for it to be put immediately preceding the consideration of the item by the committee or other body.

### **Can there be any debate on questions or statements?**

The Chair may comment on a response to a question or a statement if it has been referred by him/her to another member or to an officer but there is to be no general debate. If a question or statement relates to an item on the agenda, points arising from it may be pursued when the item is under consideration. If an item is not on the agenda, members are entitled to request its inclusion at a future meeting.

### **What if there is any dispute about procedure or the interpretation or application of these rules?**

The Chair's decision is final.