

# Questioning Lambeth Council

Guidance on the submission and consideration of public notice questions

August 2011

## Public Notice Questions...

...provide an opportunity for local people to get involved in the democratic process through the submission of questions which will be considered either by officers or at a formal Committee meeting, including scrutiny sub-committees.

## Who can ask a question?

Any person living, working or studying in the borough may submit a question about matters which are the responsibility of the council.

## What sort of questions can be asked?

### Questions must relate to services...

...that are provided wholly or in partnership by Lambeth. This ensures that meaningful action can be taken to address any issues that arise from the process.

### Questions must be concise...

...in order to enable as many as possible to be considered in the time available at the meeting.

### Questions to scrutiny committees must be strategic...

...in content. However it is acceptable for the questioner to highlight their experiences to support their question.

## What sort of questions can't be asked?

### Public notice questions are not complaints

Questions must not be personal to the questioner. One of the purposes of public

notice questions is to highlight poor and ineffective services or policies with a view to securing improvement of services through the democratic process.

If your concerns are based upon your individual dealings with an officer or with a particular service, then the council's complaints system would be a more appropriate route. Please ring the Complaints Team on 020 7926 9694, e-mail [complaints@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@lambeth.gov.uk) or visit the council's website for more information.

If your question relates to an issue that is the subject of an ongoing complaint then it cannot be considered as a public notice question.

This does not mean, however, that if you have had a negative experience of the service you should not submit a public notice question. A question should be submitted if you think that your experience of the service is likely to have been shared by others and you have ideas about how the service could be improved.

### In addition matters which:

- Are not the responsibility of the council;
- Are defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
- Would incur disproportionate cost;
- Raise essentially the same issue as a question, deputation or petition in the previous 6 months;
- Require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information; or;
- Are the subject of legal proceedings..

...will not be considered as public notice questions.

## How to submit a question

Complete the [online form](#). Alternatively contact the Democratic Services or Scrutiny

Teams (details below) who can also offer advice and guidance on the suitability or drafting of your question.

## If your question is accepted...

**...your question will be acknowledged and you will be notified how it will be responded to.** The Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny, in consultation with Councillors, will determine whether the question will be referred direct to an officer for reply or will be considered by a committee.

**...if your question is referred to a scrutiny committee, it will be forwarded to members of the relevant committee.**

**...you will receive an answer within 10 working days.**

**...your question and the answer will be published on the agenda of the next appropriate committee (you will be notified of the date)\*.**

**...the officer responsible for answering the question will attend the committee committee.**

**...you will be invited to attend the committee meeting.**

**...you are entitled to ask a supplementary question.**

Your question, the response, and any other related papers will be published before the meeting and these papers will be available to the public. If you are disclosing information that you wish to keep confidential, please state clearly the reasons for wishing to maintain confidentiality. Alternatively, you may wish to use other procedures such as the complaints process.

You may request that your question is withdrawn if you are satisfied with the response and see no reason to pursue the issue further.

If you do not receive a response by the due

date please contact the Scrutiny or Democratic Services teams who will chase the response. The matter will also be brought to the attention of the relevant committee.

## At the meeting...

You will be notified in your acknowledgement of the time, date and location of the meeting at which your question will be considered.

Public questions are normally considered at the start of a meeting. A maximum of thirty minutes is set aside to consider all questions. During consideration of your question, councillors will ask questions to officers and yourself. You will be given the opportunity to ask one supplementary question.

After the committee has considered the item, it will assess whether the matter has been satisfactorily dealt with. If dissatisfied the committee may decide to make recommendations to Cabinet or the relevant decision-maker.

Please note that scrutiny committee's are **non-decision making** and therefore can only make recommendations.

## Contact us

Should you wish to discuss the information contained within this leaflet or any other matters raised please do not hesitate to contact the Scrutiny or Democratic Services teams, they will be happy to help you.

For alternative ways of raising issues and engaging with the Council, including how to contact your local councillor, please refer to the [how to get involved](#) website.

**Email:** [democracy@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@lambeth.gov.uk) or [scrutiny@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@lambeth.gov.uk)

**Phone us:** 020 7926 2170/2173

**Write to us:**

Freepost RSAZ-KRRX-UXHJ  
Scrutiny Team  
Lambeth Town Hall Brixton Hill  
London SW2 1RW

**Web:** [www.lambeth.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/scrutiny)  
[www.lambeth.gov.uk/democracy](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/democracy)

\* If your question does not fall within the terms of reference of any of the council's committees, it will not be referred to a committee but will be referred to an officer and you will receive a written response only.