

Public Questions – Guidance for Officers

Who can ask a question and to whom?

Any member of the council, resident, business rate payer, or local government elector of Lambeth Council. Questions may be asked of any member or officer of the council provided the matter is part of their responsibilities.

Where are questions sent?

Questions are sent to Head of Democratic Services at Lambeth Town Hall; they may also be emailed.

What sort of questions can be asked?

- Questions must be reasonable
- Questions must relate to council services
- Questions can be asked of any aspect of council services
- Questions are not complaints
- Questions are dealt with in public

What is the process for submitting questions?

The question process can be divided into two stages:

- Pre -committee
- Committee

Pre committee

- The questioner submits a question.
- Questioner informed that he/she will receive a response within 15 clear working days (date is specified)
- Question is sent to relevant department, and relevant Chair of Scrutiny Committee as well Cabinet Member, the department must send a response to the questioner by the date specified and copy response to Democratic Services and all those listed above.
- After response is sent to questioner. Matter is put on the agenda of the next available meeting unless questioner requests that the matter be withdrawn.

Committee

- Questions are considered at the start of a meeting, priority is given to public questions
- A maximum of thirty minutes is set aside to consider all questions, though this limit can be extended by the committee.
- During the consideration of the question, members of the committee will ask questions to both officers and the questioner.
- One supplementary question can be asked as a result of the response that has been given.
- After the committee has considered the item it will assess whether the matter has been satisfactorily dealt with, or whether further action is required, to address the issues that have been raised, as a result of the question.

Specific guidance

When you receive a question

- 1) Note the day it was received
- 2) Note the date which a response must be sent to the questioner

If you have any immediate concerns, please alert Democratic Services as soon as possible. Similarly, if there are any reasons as to why the question cannot be answered within the prescribed period, or if the question, in your opinion should be dealt with as a complaint, then please alert Democratic Services as soon as you can.

When preparing your answer, please answer the question as clearly and comprehensively as you can. Please note that Members and Committees are very mindful of the quality of responses and ensuring that they are customer friendly. Each point of the question must be answered and offer options for ensuring that the issues that are raised by the questioner will be dealt with in the future. If in doubt liaise with the relevant Lead Scrutiny Officer or Democratic Services officer before the answer is dispatched. If confidential information is being disclosed in your answer, please let the relevant Scrutiny Officer know.

Please remember that you will need to clear the response with the relevant cabinet member prior to dispatch.

At the meeting, be prepared to answer any supplementary questions from councillors and the questioner on the topic. Meetings are held in public and there may be others present. If you cannot answer all the questions, then say so and offer to provide the information either outside of the meeting or at the next meeting of the committee.

Any queries?

If you have any queries in relation to the public question process, please contact Democratic Services on 020 7926 2170, or Scrutiny 020 7926 2173. Alternatively email us on democracy@lambeth.gov.uk or scrutiny@lambeth.gov.uk .