

Guidance on the submission and consideration of Public Notice Questions

What are Public Notice Questions (PNQs)?

Public Notice Questions (PNQs) 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 Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Who can ask a question and what sort of questions can be asked?

Any person living, working, or studying in the borough may submit a question about matters which are the responsibility of the Council. 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;
- be concise to enable as many questions as possible to be considered in the time available at the meeting; and,
- 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?

Questions must be strategic in nature. 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 may be a more appropriate route. Please ring the Complaints Team on 020 7926 9694, e-mail 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 will not be considered as public notice questions 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 six months;
- are purely factual in nature for which other mechanisms can be used to provide the information requested;
- require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information; or,
- are the subject of legal proceedings.

How do you submit a question?

Contact the Democratic Services via email on democracy@lambeth.gov.uk. If you are disclosing information that you wish to keep confidential, please clearly state the reasons for wishing to maintain confidentiality. Alternatively, you may wish to use other procedures such as the complaints process.

How are questions processed by the Council?

In consultation with the Chief Whip and relevant Cabinet Member or Chair of the meeting concerned, Democratic Services will determine whether the question will be referred directly to an officer for reply or whether it falls within the terms of reference of a scrutiny or another committee, having regard to:

- whether the issue raised is a local or borough-wide concern;
- the most practical way of progressing the concerns raised (taking into account dates of forthcoming meetings);
- whether a petition, public notice question or deputation on the same issue has been considered within the last six months; and,
- the number of questions received, given the time limits that apply.

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.

What happens if your question is accepted to be heard at a Council meeting?

Your question will be acknowledged, and you will be notified how it will be responded to. If your question is referred to a committee, it will also be forwarded to the Chair and Vice-Chairs, and:

- 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 and these papers will be available to the public;
- you will be notified of the time, date and location of the meeting at which your question will be considered and invited to attend; and,
- the officer responsible for answering the question will attend the committee.

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 Democratic Services on democracy@lambeth.gov.uk.

At the meeting

Public questions are normally considered at the start of a meeting. 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 most committees are non-decision-making bodies 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 [our website](#).

Email: democracy@lambeth.gov.uk

Phone: 020 7926 2170

Write: Democratic Services, Lambeth Town Hall, 1 Brixton Hill, SW2 1RW.

Web: www.lambeth.gov.uk/democracy