

Protocol for Public Questions

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Related Legislation/Applicable Section of Legislation	
Related Policies, Procedures, Guidelines, Standards, Frameworks	MEA Standing Orders
Replaces	
Policy Lead (Name/Position/Contact details)	Director of Corporate Services Chief Executive
Sponsor Directorate	Corporate Services
Version	Final

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Protocol outlines the process for the submission, assessment and asking of questions by members of the public at Mid and East Antrim Full Council meetings.
- 1.2 At each Ordinary Meeting of Council (except for the Annual General Meeting) a period of up to 15 minutes will be available to allow questions that have been submitted by members of the public who live, work or study in the Borough.
- 1.3 Any questions which are deemed to constitute either a request for information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or a complaint under the MEA Complaints procedure will be dealt with through the relevant process and the questioner will be notified accordingly.

2. Procedure for Submission of Public Questions

- 2.1 Public questions must be submitted by 12.00pm on the fifth working day prior to the Full Council meeting (normally a Monday) using the relevant form on the Council website. This means that for a Council meeting on Monday, the question must be submitted by 12.00pm on the previous Monday.
- 2.2 Each question must give the name and address of the questioner.
- 2.3 Public questions should be concise and written in no more than 100 words.
- 2.4 No person may submit more than one question to a meeting and no more than one question may be asked on behalf of an organisation at a meeting.
- 2.5 No question may be sub-divided into more than two related parts.
- 2.6 Public questions must relate to matters which fall within the remit of the Council and relate to Council functions.
- 2.7 Questions that have been accepted will be published on the Council's website along with the name of the questioner after the meeting.

3. Assessment of Questions Submitted

- 3.1 A question may be rejected if it:

- (a) is not relevant to a matter for which the Council has a responsibility or which affects the Borough;
- (b) is illegal, improper, irregular, frivolous or offensive;
- (c) is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the previous six months;
- (d) will, if answered, disclose confidential or exempt information;
- (e) relates to a planning law or licensing application;
- (f) relates to a matter or issue in respect of which a response has already been given under the Council's complaints procedure or which is currently being dealt with in accordance with the complaints procedure or other formal process, such as court or tribunal proceedings or which is the subject of threatened court or tribunal proceedings by the person asking the question or a person or group which they represent;
- (g) relates to a matter or issue of a purely personal concern to the individual asking the question or their family members;
- (h) is lengthy or a speech; or
- (i) is unintelligible.

3.2 The Chief Executive along with the Mayor/Chair will make a final determination on whether a question submitted may be rejected under Council's Standing Orders.

3.3 If a question is rejected, the reasons will be notified to the questioner in writing.

3.4 The questions will be put to the Council in order of those received, until the 15 minutes slot is used.

3.5 Any question which cannot be dealt with at the meeting, because of lack of time, will be dealt with by a written answer to be sent within five working days of the Council.

4. Presentation and Response to Public Questions in the Meeting

4.1 The Mayor will deal with questions at the Full Council meeting in the order in which they were received.

4.2 A questioner may attend in person to ask their question; but they may only ask the question as written and will not be permitted to alter the question any further.

- 4.3 When a questioner does not attend in person an officer will read the question.
- 4.4 Once the response to the question has been read out at the meeting, the questioner is not permitted any supplementary questions.