

14. QUESTIONS, STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS BY THE PUBLIC AT ORDINARY MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

14.1 General

- (i) Members of the public having given proper notice may ask questions of, make statements to the Leader, a Portfolio Holder or a Chairman of Committee or Panel on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the whole or part of the area at an Ordinary Meeting of the Council.
- (ii) A period of 30 minutes will be set aside at each meeting and normally a maximum of six questions will be heard. If notice of more than six questions is received for the same meeting, priority will be given to matters in accordance with the order in which they are received.
- (iii) The Speaker shall have discretion to extend the question period to allow any question in progress at the expiry of the 30-minute period to be completed and answered or to allow more than six questions to be heard where these relate to items on the agenda. Where more than six questions are raised and the matters do not relate to items on the agenda, the person shall be offered the option of a written reply or deferral to the next meeting of the Council.
- (iv) When matters are raised that relate to items on the agenda, the Speaker may decide to defer the question until that item is reached and take it before Councillors start their debate.
- (v) The Council has a duty to listen to the concerns of people who live, work and study in Shropshire. Where these are identified in a petition, the matter must be considered in accordance with its Petition Scheme. This provides for a petition containing 1000 or more signatures to be debated by the Council, unless the petition has been presented previously to members.
- (vii) The Chief Executive may reject any petition which in his/her opinion is considered to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate.
- (vii) To be eligible for debate, a petition must identify the petition organiser, who shall not also be a member of the Shropshire Council. It shall contain the names and addresses or, alternatively, the names and place of work or study, as well as the signatures, of at least 1000 people. In addition the petition must have normally been received at

least 10 working days prior to the Council meeting at which it is intended to be debated.

- (viii) Where these conditions have been satisfied, unless the petition requests that a Senior Officer gives evidence at a public meeting, the matter will be scheduled for debate at the next ordinary Council Meeting or such other date as determined by the Speaker in consultation with the Chief Executive. The petition organiser will be informed of the date as soon as is practicable.
- (ix) At the commencement of the debate the petition organiser will be given 5 minutes in which to present the petition after which there shall be a debate of up to 15 minutes duration. The appropriate Portfolio Holder will then reply, after which a vote will be taken, where appropriate.
- (x) If the petition relates to a matter over which the Council has no control, unless the petition calls for action which is in conflict with the Council's own policy, Members will consider whether to make representations on behalf of the Community to the relevant body.

14.2 Order of questions, statements and petitions

Questions will be asked or petitions presented in the order that notice of them was received, except that the Speaker may group similar questions together.

14.3 Notice of questions, statements or petitions

A question may only be asked, a statement made and a petition presented, if notice has been given to the Chief Executive no later than two clear working days before the day of the meeting. Each question must give the name and address of the questioner and must name the Member of the Council to whom it is to be put.

14.4 Number of questions/statements

At any one meeting, no person may submit more than two questions, and no more than three such questions may be asked on behalf of one organisation.

14.5 Scope of questions, statements and petitions

The Chief Executive may reject a question or petition if (in his/her opinion) it:

- is not about the matter where the Council has a responsibility or a legitimate interest;

- is defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
- is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; or
- requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

14.6 Asking the question at the meeting

Each question will be presented and the relevant Portfolio Holder will response in turn after which the questioner if present will be asked whether he/she has a supplementary question. If the questioner is not present, the Speaker may permit someone to ask a supplementary question on his/her behalf.

14.7 Supplementary questions

A questioner asking a supplementary question may ask one question without notice of the Member who replied to the first question. The supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply.

14.8 Written answers

Any supplementary question which cannot be dealt with during public question time will be dealt with by a written answer.

14.9 Reference of question, statement or petition to the Executive or a Committee

Unless the Speaker decides otherwise, no discussion will take place on any question but any Member may move that a matter raised by a question or a supplementary or a petition be referred to the Executive, or the appropriate Committee, Sub-Committee or Scrutiny Committee. Once seconded, such a motion will be voted on without discussion.

14.10 Speaker's Discretion

The Speaker may in his/her absolute discretion allow a question to be put or a petition presented even where the requirements of this rule have not been complied with and may allow a Member of the public to make a statement which does not amount to a question.