

4.11 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (INCLUDING TREATMENT OF SMALL PETITIONS)

Note: References in this section to petitions relate to petitions which individually or collectively (on the same subject matter) contain under 5000 signatures.

4.11.1 Public representations (questions, statements or a petition) must be received in writing by the Monitoring Officer by 5pm on the Thursday prior to the meeting (for Wednesday Council meetings) to be considered at that meeting. Any questions, statements or petitions received after the deadline will only be considered with the discretion of the Chair of the relevant meeting. The questioner will need to set out reasons for their late submission to be considered at the meeting. If the Chair rejects the late question or statement then a written reply will be provided by the council within 20 working days of the meeting.

Notwithstanding the above, where a question relates to a matter which is included on the agenda for a meeting at which the question is to be put but that agenda or any Officers Report has not been made available before the normal deadline for submission of questions by 5pm three clear working days before the meeting then provided written notice of a question is received within 24 hours of that Agenda or Report having been so published then the question shall be allowed.

4.11.2 If a person submits more than three questions (including any sub-division or component questions ie. Question 1a, 1b and 1c would mean three questions the same as Question 1, 2 or 3) then only the first three questions shall be accepted for a meeting (subject to those questions not duplicating or being similar to other questions received from other persons for the meeting). Where there is duplication or the question or statement is similar then it is proposed that those will be rejected. The Monitoring Officer shall adjudicate on the application of this in consultation with the Chair.

4.11.3 Public representations will be rejected by the Chair of the Council, following consultation with the Monitoring Officer, if they:

- (a) Do not relate to a matter for which the council has a responsibility or which affects the County;
- (b) Are defamatory, frivolous, offensive, vexatious or unlawful;
- (c) Are substantially the same as a public representation which has been put at a meeting of the Council, Executive or a Committee in the past six months;
- (d) Require or request the disclosure of confidential or exempt information in any response;
- (e) Relate to any non-determined planning application or town and village green application
- (f) Name or identify individual service users, members of staff or members of staff of partner agencies
- (g) Are considered to be inappropriate for the particular meeting

The Monitoring Officer can edit public representations in consultation with the author and the Chair. If changes cannot be agreed the Monitoring Officer can reject the representations.

4.11.4 The Chair's Schedule for the meeting includes details of public representations. They are also detailed in the Minutes together with the responses (given at the meeting or provided following the meeting). Up to 20 minutes is allowed for public question time.

4.11.5 Members of the public have up to 3 minutes to introduce and present their representations. If a member of the public is unable to attend a meeting in person, then they will be allowed to arrange for someone to ask the question on their behalf. If no person is able to put the question to the meeting then either the Chair or the Monitoring Officer shall present their question to the meeting.

4.11.6 A Member (usually the relevant Lead Member) will normally provide a brief verbal response to public representations at the meeting. There will be no member debate. If a full response cannot be given at the meeting, then a written response will be provided within 20 working days of the meeting.

4.12 TREATMENT OF LARGE PETITIONS

4.12.1 Petitions of 5000 or more signatures (individually or collectively) qualify for a 15 minute debate at a Full Council meeting if notice is given in accordance with 4.11 above.

4.12.2 The petition will be regarded as having been formally handed over to the Chair and the Council by being placed on the front table at the meeting.

4.12.3 The petition organiser will have a maximum of 5 minutes to introduce the petition. Any related public questions to the petition will then be considered – the normal rules for public questions set out in 4.11 above apply.

4.12.4 The relevant Lead Member has a maximum of 5 minutes to respond to the petition organiser / public questions prior to a member debate which is limited to 15 minutes.

4.13 FILMING OF FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS BY THIRD PARTIES

4.13 Recording and transmission of formal Council meetings by third parties is allowed to in accordance with the Somerset County Council Recording Protocol: Third Party Recording of Committees, Boards and Panels as set out as Appendix I in Part 2 of the Constitution. Details of the provisions are included on all formal meeting agendas and are displayed in the meeting rooms.