

# Public Participation Protocol

This is the protocol for enabling public participation in Full Council meetings.

## Requests to ask a question

### Who can ask a question?

Anyone who lives, works or studies in Westminster is eligible to submit a question.

In order to verify this, participants will be asked to include an address and postcode, when submitting their question, so that this can be checked. This data will be held in accordance with our data retention policies and destroyed when no longer required. If a Westminster postcode is not provided the submission will be considered invalid.

### What can the question be on?

- All submissions must be questions, and not statements.
- Questions must be on the subject of local issues and relate to a Council function.
- Questions must be free from inflammatory, abusive or inappropriate language.
- Questions cannot relate to a specific person.
- Submissions cannot be made by political parties.
- Submissions cannot be related to any live planning or licence application or about any matter where there is a right of appeal to the courts, a tribunal or to a government minister.
- If an issue has already been raised or the questioner has previously asked a question in the last twelve months, it/they will not be accepted. A list of previous questions and questioners will be provided on the public participation page of the website.
- If there are a number of questions on the same topic, discussion will be encouraged between all those who have submitted a question to encourage only one question to be asked.
- The question presented MUST be the question asked, there will be no allowance for any change in wording, except in the event that circumstances have changed in the intervening period, in which case the Lord Mayor may apply some discretion in the matter. Any requested deviations from the pre-submitted question should be shared with the Council in advance by emailing [public.speaking@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:public.speaking@westminster.gov.uk).

## Petitions

The public participation slots are also available for a petition to be presented, based on the following guidelines, contained in the [Council's Petition Scheme](#).

- If a petition reaches over 100 signatures it is eligible to be presented as part of the public participation item at the next Ordinary Full Council meeting after the petition closes.
- The Petitions Team will contact the petitioner once their petition closes, if it has met the threshold, to invite them to present this at the next Ordinary Full Council meeting and to explain the process.

- There will be no change to the item in the Petitions Scheme which relates to petitions which have 500 signatures, or over. This will continue to be sent to Cabinet for discussion but the option to present this at Full Council will also be available. In this case after the Cabinet discussion, either before or after the Full Council meeting, depending on dates, a written response from the Cabinet Member will be supplied.
- Any petition presented at an Ordinary Full Council meeting will get an oral response, on the night, from the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chair, followed by a formal response via the online Petitions site, dependent on the number of signatories.
- If a petitioner does not want to present the petition publicly it will be responded to in line with the existing Petitions scheme.

### **How to submit questions**

- There is a preference for questions to be submitted via the online form available on the Council's website.
- If questions are not able to be submitted online they should be sent to Committee and Councillor Support Manager, 17<sup>th</sup> floor, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP. The letter should contain the question, name, address, post code and contact details, in particular a contact telephone number.
- Questions sent by hard copy MUST be received, not just sent, by 2pm seven days before the meeting takes place.
- If there are any questions about the process or attendance at the Council meetings these can be sent to [public.speaking@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:public.speaking@westminster.gov.uk). However, questions will only be accepted for presentation at Full Council if submitted via the form or by letter.
- Questions may only be submitted within a set window in advance of an Ordinary Full Council meeting. This window opens 21 days before the meeting takes place and closes seven days before the meeting takes place.
- Slots will be allocated on a random basis taking into account the 'what' guidelines above and filling the number of anticipated slots at any given meeting.
- The Governance and Councillor Liaison team will ask all questioners to confirm their attendance at the meeting 48 hours in advance, if attendance is not confirmed by 24 hours in advance of the meeting, the place may be offered to someone on the waiting list.

### **How questions or petitions will be heard at the Ordinary Full Council meeting**

All participants must be able to attend the Full Council meeting, in person or (where unavoidable circumstances dictate) virtually, to present their question, slots are not able to be passed to others.

In extreme circumstances where the participant is unable to attend at short notice e.g. due to illness, an option will be available for the question to be read out on their behalf by the Lord Mayor, but this is only in exceptional circumstances.

Ordinary Full Council meetings take place at Old Marylebone Town Hall, 97-113 Marylebone Road, NW1 5PT; with the meeting commencing at 7pm.

Attendees will be asked to arrive at the location by 6.40pm at the latest so that they can be met, briefed and seated.

30 minutes will be made available for the item, towards the start of the meeting.

Each questioner will have up to two minutes to ask their question or present their petition and the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chair will have up to two minutes to respond.

The **question** presented MUST be the question asked, there will be no allowance for any change in wording. The Lord Mayor has the right to stop any question which is not as listed.

For the **presentation of a petition** the two minutes should be used to explain the subject of the petition only, nothing else, even if it is considered a related matter. The Lord Mayor has the right to stop any speech on a topic which is not considered relative to the petition presented.

Questioners will be able to stay, after the item, for the remainder of the Council meeting, if they so wish, but they will be asked to move to the public gallery.