

Public Question Time at County Council and Cabinet

Any member of the public, being resident in, or a registered local government elector for Suffolk may put a question to the County Council or Cabinet.

What is the deadline for applying to speak?

Questions must be received, in writing, by no later than 12 noon on the fourth working day before the meeting (meeting dates can be viewed on the SCC website: www.suffolk.gov.uk/meeting-dates). If you have said that you would like to attend the meeting, and have provided an email address, you will receive a written response the day before the meeting. You are then entitled to ask a supplementary question of the Cabinet Member at the meeting and receive an oral response.

How long does Public Question Time last?

A period of 20 minutes will be set aside at each meeting for public questions, and questions will be taken in the order in which they were received. If 20 minutes proves insufficient time to deal with all the questions received, the Chairman will decide whether to extend the time or call a halt to Question Time.

What can I ask about?

Your question must be about something within the Council's responsibilities, or something the Council is able to influence. It must not be defamatory or offensive, or require the Council to disclose confidential information.

If your question is essentially the same as one that has been answered at a Public Questions session during the previous six months, the Council or Cabinet will not take it again but will send you a copy of the earlier answer.

How will my question be answered?

Each question will be answered, in writing, on behalf of the appropriate Cabinet member. These written answers will be provided to you the day before the meeting, so that you can consider the response and think about a supplementary question.

How many questions can I ask?

Each person can only ask one question. If you are attending the meeting you may also ask one supplementary question, arising directly from the answer to your original question.

It is the usual practice for the initial public questions and answer to be read out at the meeting, with the supplementary question and answer to also be given at the meeting. There is a time limit of up to a maximum of one minute for each question and three minutes for the respective answer.

What will happen during Public Question Time?

When the Public Questions item on the agenda is reached, the Chairman will refer to each question in order. The Chairman will invite each questioner in turn to sit at a microphone. When it is your turn the Chairman will invite you to read out your question. The Cabinet member will give their answer (which you will have already been sent).

The Chairman will then ask you if you wish to put a supplementary question, reminding you that it must arise from the answer you have received. When asking a supplementary question, you may only ask a question and not make a statement. If you make a statement or ask an inappropriate question, the Chairman may interrupt you accordingly.

If the Cabinet member does not have the relevant information to hand to answer your supplementary question adequately, a written answer may be provided. The written answer will be sent to you after the meeting.

Priority will be given to those who have come to the meeting. Where a questioner does not attend the meeting, no supplementary question can be asked.

Can I make a statement rather than ask a question?

Public comments are not permitted at meetings of the Council. At Cabinet meetings they are allowed at the Chairman's discretion. If the Chairman wishes to hear comments from members of the public, they will be treated in the same way as Public Questions.

What will happen after Public Question Time?

After Public Question Time, you may stay for the remainder of the meeting or leave, as you wish.

A note of the issues raised will be made and will form a distinct part of the minutes of the meeting. The minutes will provide a brief outline of the issues raised and identify the questioners and the responses given. The unconfirmed minutes will be available no later than five working days before the following meeting of the Council or Cabinet.

For Cabinet meetings held in the King Edmund Chamber at Endeavour House an audio recording is made of the meetings and will be made available within 5 working days.

County Council meetings are webcast live and the webcast is also available to watch after the meeting.

Where are the meetings held?

Most of the meetings of Council and Cabinet are held at Endeavour House, Ipswich, where there are arrangements for people with mobility difficulties. If a meeting is held away from Endeavour House, every effort is made to ensure that it is accessible to all. Most Council and Cabinet meetings are open to the public, and there is an area of seating for people wishing to observe the meeting.

Fire and safety considerations determine the seating capacity of the public area and when a particular proposal attracts considerable interest, if possible alternative arrangements will be made to accommodate those wishing to listen to the proceedings. If the Council or Cabinet considers confidential information, the public and press will be asked to leave for that part of the meeting.

What time should I arrive?

Please try to arrive about 15 minutes before the meeting, so that we can explain the seating arrangements and use of the microphones. If you have a disability which you think may affect the seating arrangements or give rise to any special requirements, please let us know as soon as possible in advance of the meeting (see below for contact details). We can also provide information about disabled parking facilities.

How do I register to take part in Public Question Time?

Your application, in writing, must be received by no later than 12 noon on the fourth working day before the meeting.

Register your place using the online form: www.suffolk.gov.uk/apply-to-speak

Or send your application (including the wording of your question) to:

Email: committee.services@suffolk.gov.uk; or

Address: Democratic Services, Suffolk County Council, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 2BX

Please make sure you state clearly:

- Your name, address and telephone number.
- The wording of your question.
- If appropriate, the name of any organisation you represent.

Please note that if necessary, to fully answer your query, we will pass your contact details on to officers of the Council and County Councillors.

If you have any queries, or need any assistance to participate in the meeting, please telephone Democratic Services on: 01473 265119.