

‘Having your Say’ at Meetings of Cambridge City Council



Introduction

Are you concerned about a City Council service or an issue that affects local people?

Did you know that you can ask a question or make a statement at a meeting of the Council?

This guide sets out the rules for public question time and explains how you can get involved. The Council needs to know your views, and public question time is a great way to get involved in local decision-making.

At which meetings can I ask a question/make a statement?

Questions can be asked or statements made at most meetings. There are a few meetings not open to the public because they deal with personal matters.

Planning Committee, Licensing Sub-Committees and Joint Development Control Committee have their own schemes for public speaking (see pages 6 – 9)

Area Committees have a dedicated 'Open Forum' where you are able to raise concerns in your area or ask questions of your Ward Councillors (see page 5)

What can I ask questions/make statements about?

The question/statement must relate to:

- the Council; or
- the services provided by, or on behalf of, the Council.

Are there any restrictions on what I can ask a question/make a statement about?

The question/statement must not:

- contain offensive or defamatory expressions
- relate to the conduct of individual Council employees or to human resources matters
- not divulge confidential or exempt information
- be identical or very similar to a question/statement that has already been answered at a previous meeting.

Are there deadlines for sending in questions/statements?

Yes. If your question/statement concerns a matter already on the agenda for the meeting you must inform the Committee Manager before the meeting starts.

If your question/statement does not directly concern a matter already on the agenda, you must inform the Committee Manager by 10am on the working day preceding the meeting.

How do I contact the Committee Manager?

Details of the Committee Manager are printed on each individual agenda, and it is best to contact them by phone or email.

What happens if I cannot attend the meeting?

You should tell us if you will not be attending the meeting. If you are unable to attend the meeting you may ask the Chair to read out the question/statement to the meeting on your behalf.

The Chair may:

- ask the question/statement on behalf of the questioner;
- indicate that a written reply will be given (you will receive a copy of any written response given); or
- decide, in the absence of the questioner, that the question/statement will not be dealt with.

What do I need to do on the day of the meeting?

You should arrive at the venue 15 minutes before the start of the meeting and ask for the Committee Manager. The Committee Manager will be able to answer any last minute questions and check that you are happy with the process.

When will I be able to speak?

Public questions/statements are normally dealt with at the beginning of the meeting. However, in some cases, it may be more appropriate for you to speak later if it relates to a topic on the agenda.

How long will I be able to speak for?

You can speak for up to three minutes and should direct your question/statement to the Chair. Once you have received your reply you will have a further two minutes for a supplementary question/statement.

What response will I be given to my question / statement?

A response to a question/statement will be either:

- given orally at the meeting; or

- where the reply cannot easily be given orally, be provided in writing and published in the minutes of the meeting.

What happens next?

If the topic you raise is not related to an item on the agenda, no discussion by the committee will normally take place on your question/statement.

Public Speaking at meetings of the Area Committees

What can I ask questions/make statements about?

You can raise any issue of concern or interest in respect of the local area.

Are there deadlines for sending in questions/statements?

NO. On arrival at the meeting you will be asked to fill in a 'Question Form' or alternatively you can raise your hand during this section of the agenda.

What do I need to do on the day of the meeting?

You should arrive at the venue 15 minutes before the start of the meeting and ask for the Committee Manager. The Committee Manager will be able to answer any last minute questions and check that you are happy with the process.

When will I be able to speak?

The 'Open Forum' section is normally dealt with at the beginning of the meeting. However this may vary, and you are advised to contact the Committee Manager prior to the meeting.

How long will I be able to speak for?

The 'Open Forum' section will last for a maximum of 30 minutes, and the Chair may impose a limit on individual contributions.

What happens next?

Where possible a Ward Councillor or an officer of the Council will answer your question at the meeting. If this is not possible information may be fed back to you outside of the meeting and/or reported back on at the next meeting.

Public Speaking at meetings of the Planning Committee or Joint Development Control Committee

You can make a statement on any planning application providing you have submitted a written representation to the Planning Department within the consultation period.

Are there any restrictions on what I can make a statement about?

Your statement should be based on the issues raised in your written representation. You may choose to circulate your written speaking notes but will not be allowed to circulate additional information (which includes any drawings or visual materials) that has not been verified by the Planning Department and/or are already on the public planning file.

Are there deadlines for sending in statements?

YES. You must inform the Committee Manager by 12noon on the working day preceding the meeting.

How do I contact the Committee Manager?

Details of the Committee Manager are printed on each individual agenda, and it is best to contact them by phone or email.

What do I need to do on the day of the meeting

You should arrive at the venue 15 minutes before the start of the meeting and ask for the Committee Manager. The Committee Manager will be able to answer any last minute questions and check that you are happy with the process.

When will I be able to speak?

Agenda items for which there are public speakers may be taken first, normally in the order of the agenda. This order may be different at Area Committees and you are advised to contact the Committee Manager prior to the meeting.

How long will I be able to speak for?

The Chair will invite you to sit at the Committee table and you can speak for up to three minutes.

You should direct your statement to the Chair and you will be alerted when the three minutes has elapsed.

Multiple speakers on an application: If more than one person wants to speak about the same application, you may be asked to choose someone to act as a spokesperson. This will be discussed before hand with the Committee Manager.

When several people wish to speak on the same application but wish to raise different issues, the Committee Manager will liaise with the Chair.

What happens next?

At the conclusion of your statement you will be then asked to leave the Committee table and return to sit in the public area.

The Committee will discuss the application and take a vote to approve or refuse. You will not be permitted to participate in this section of the meeting.

Public Speaking at meetings of the Licensing Committee

There are two types of Licensing Committee, Licensing Sub-Committees which deal with alcohol and late night refreshment and the full Committee.

- Full Committees are where decisions are needed about Licensing Policy. The general rules about speaking at Committees apply to these meetings.
- Licensing Sub-Committees make decisions on a particular application. You can only speak at a Licensing Sub-Committee if you've made a relevant representation, which is a written submission to the Licensing Department during the public consultation period.

Licensing Sub-Committees can also be convened to deal with Street Trading, Gambling and Sex Entertainment. The Committee Manager will be able to advise on any public speaking rights.

Are there any restrictions on what I can make a statement about?

At Licensing Sub-Committees there are no restrictions, but your submission should be focused on the four licensing objectives, as these are what the Sub-Committee will make the decision on the basis of.

The Licensing Objectives are

- The prevention of crime and disorder;
- Public safety;
- The prevention of public nuisance; and
- The protection of children from harm.

Are there deadlines for sending in questions/statements?

You need to register to speak with the Licensing department prior to the meeting.

How do I contact the Committee Manager?

Details of the Committee Manager are printed on each individual agenda, and it is best to contact them by phone or email.

What do I need to do on the day of the meeting?

You should arrive at the venue 15 minutes before the start of the meeting and ask for the Committee Manager. The Committee Manager will be able to answer any last minute questions and check that you are happy with the process.

When will I be able to speak?

You'll be invited to speak as an interested party. This is after the applicant and responsible authorities have spoken.

How long will I be able to speak for?

There is no time limit although the Chair will encourage you to be concise.

What happens next?

Following all the submissions, the Sub-Committee will leave the room and discuss in private their decision. Once they have made a decision, the Sub-Committee will return and inform all parties together.

If you need any special help with accessing Council meetings or if you have any special requirements please advise the Committee Services Team before the meeting.

For more information please contact:
Committee Services on 01223 457013
Email: democratic.services@cambridge.gov.uk

Or visit our website at:
<http://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx>