

## Public Question Time – Guidelines

This information is provided to assist members of the public understanding “public question time” at Council Meetings and to outline the associated guiding framework.

**Note:** Members of the public are encouraged to submit questions to the Shire administration for a direct response on any matter at any time, rather than waiting for a Council Meeting to submit a question. Questions outside of the public question time forum can be submitted, by either:

- email to: [soa@ashburton.wa.gov.au](mailto:soa@ashburton.wa.gov.au), or
- post to: Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Ashburton, PO Box 567 Tom Price WA 6751.

### General information

- The public are actively encouraged to attend Shire of Ashburton Council meetings. If you do attend, you will be required to record your name in the attendance register, prior to entering a meeting. However, you are permitted to come and go from the meeting, as you wish. Some parts of meeting are closed to the public to enable confidential matters to be discussed.
- The *Local Government Act 1995*, *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996* and *Shire of Ashburton Standing Orders Local Law 2012* all refer to public question time.

Public question time is specifically provided for in Council Meetings, Special Council Meetings, Annual General Meeting of Electors and Committee Meeting agendas. Please note that public question time is only provided for in Committee meeting agendas, where a Committee has a delegated a power or duty. Public question time is always dealt with before any general or specific business of a meeting, where a formal decision of the Council or Committee is required.

- Public question time is generally open for a period of 15 minutes. The Presiding Member at a meeting may close public question time earlier if there are no further questions. Any unused part of the allotted 15 minute period may be used for other matters.
- The Presiding Member may, based on the number of questions to be asked at particular a meeting, determine that a further period of 15 minutes for public question time is necessary. The Council may support such a request for a further period, at its discretion.



## Exclusions

Questions during public question time will be excluded and not responded to, where a question:

- (a) does not relate to a matter affecting the Shire of Ashburton or a function of the Council or the Shire administration.
- (b) does not directly relate to the purpose of a Special Council Meeting.
- (c) to a Committee does not relate to a function of that Committee.

Where this decision is made, the Shire administration will provide a direct response to the author of the question.

The Presiding Member may also determine other exclusions in accordance with these guidelines.

## How to submit a public question

Public questions to be presented at a Council Meeting are to be submitted on the Public Question Time Form or online via the Shire's website [Submit Public Questions » Shire of Ashburton](#).

Completed Public Question Time forms are to be sent, either by:

- email to: [governance@ashburton.wa.gov.au](mailto:governance@ashburton.wa.gov.au); or
- post to: Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Ashburton, PO Box 567 Tom Price WA 6751.


Alternatively, completed forms can be handed to a Shire officer, at least 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the meeting.


Complex questions that are reasonably likely to require significant research should be submitted a minimum of 5 days prior to the meeting.

## Public Question Time (Operating Framework)

The Presiding Member formally opens public question time as part of the agenda process and the following operating framework, applies.

1. Questions should be brief and concise where possible, and relate to the ordinary business of the Shire of Ashburton or a function of the Council. Questions are not restricted to a matter on a relevant meeting agenda (with the exception of a Special Council Meeting).
2. Each person is entitled to ask up to three questions, before other members of the public will be invited to ask their questions in turn, as time permits. If multiple pages are to be submitted to support the question/s to be presented, these should be attached to the completed Public Question Form. Sub-parts of questions are counted as a separate question.

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3. The order questions are asked, is the order questions are received and entered into the public question time register.
  4. Once a person has used up their allowed number of questions, the Presiding Member may ask if they have more questions. If they do, the Presiding Member will note this request and place them at the end of the queue; the person will resume their seat in the gallery.
  5. Public question time may close prior to the 15 minutes, if all questions have been asked and if there are no further questions.
  6. Any person who has not registered will be given an opportunity to ask a question if time permits, after those who have registered, subject to the question being provided in writing beforehand.
  7. Each person invited to ask a question must stand and give their full name, and read out their question, which is to be directed to the Presiding Member.
    - (a) If a person is not comfortable or prepared to orally present the prepared and submitted question, the Presiding Member may at their absolute discretion seek the assistance of the Shire administration to read the question on the authors behalf.
    - (b) In the event that the Presiding Member chooses not to facilitate the reading of the prepared question by the administration, it will be set aside, and not be recorded in the meeting documents. A written response on the question will be provided to the author by the Shire administration.
  8. The Presiding Member may, at their discretion:
    - accept or reject any question and his/her decision is final.
    - make a determination that a question is offensive, defamatory or the like and that it may not be answered or published.
    - determine that a question put, is repetitive in nature and has been previously answered.
    - nominate another Council member or a Shire officer to answer the question.
    - take a question on notice. In this case a written response will be provided by the Shire administration as soon as possible to the person that asked the question, and the details of the response provided will be included in the agenda of the next appropriate meeting of the Council.
    - take the written questions put as general correspondence and arrange for the matters raised to be responded to by the Shire administration, as normal business correspondence.

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9. Where an answer to a question is provided at a meeting, the details of the question and the answer will be published in the relevant meeting documents.

### **Assistance with questions**

The Shire's Governance team are available to assist the public in preparing questions for submission.

### **Decorum and Behaviour**

- Public question time is available only for asking questions and not for making statements, deputations or presentations.
- No debate or discussion will be permitted on any question or answer.
- Members of the public are requested to respect the rights of others to speak and should not ask questions or interrupt any other person asking a question or any person providing an answer to a question.
- It is an expectation that Council members will be addressed by their respective title and surname.

### **Public Information**

The name and locality of a person who asks a question during public question time may be published by the Shire in the relevant meeting documents. Addresses will not be published.

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