

Public involvement in decision making at Sheffield City Council

How to ask and present to public questions, statements & petitions

DRAFT

What is this for?

This is a short guide which summarises how you can get involved in democratic meetings in Sheffield, specifically Full Council, Policy Committees, Governance Committee and Audit and Standards Committee. We have recently worked with citizens to review and reform our approach and the guidance below sets out how anyone in Sheffield can ask and present public questions, statements and petitions in our meetings.

There is a different approach to public questions in Local Area Committee meetings – for more information about this, see the petitions guide [here](#).

If you want more information or advice and support, please contact committees@sheffield.gov.uk

Purpose of public questions

“The citizens of Sheffield have a right to participate in the meetings of Sheffield City Council, our Committees and other Council bodies.

“Public Questions are one of the means of holding the Council to account, of getting items on public record, to raise public attention to an opportunity or issue. We welcome and want to encourage and enable greater citizen involvement in our city’s democracy and are committed to ensuring that any citizen can raise a public question (or petition) and should expect an accurate and timely response that answers the question or issue raised.

“Public questions are one way in which citizens can engage. They are a mechanism for respectfully engaging in the remit or agenda of a meeting, not a mechanism for engaging in detail or individual complaints or issues, they are not intended for engaging in debate or conversation.”

Overall approach to public questions, statements and petitions

- Maximum of two participations per person in any council meeting (i.e. Full Council, Policy Committees. Governance Committee or Audit and Standards Committee). For example:
 - 1 question or set of linked questions (max 200 words in total) & 1 agenda-related question (max 200 words) OR
 - 1 statement (max 200 words) and 1 agenda-related question (max 200 words)

- The 200 word limit for written questions, supplementary questions and verbal questions is intended to enable a person to ask a question and any related sub-questions as long as it is within the 200 word limit
 - A written question may have 4 parts and that will be considered as 1 question as long as it is within the 200 word limit.
- The 200 word limit will also apply to supplementary questions
- Chair will try and order questions in an appropriate way to bring balance and fairness and to provide parity to the issues and voices heard at our meetings.
- Petitions will continue to be treated separately to public questions, but within the same time allocation on the agenda.

Improving accessibility

We want to make it as easy as possible for everyone to get involved in our democratic meetings. But, we know that physically attending a committee meeting at a specific time of day can be difficult if you are at work, school, or if you have caring responsibilities. It can also be physically difficult if you have a disability. And for some people asking a question in front of lots of other people can be an intimidating thing to do.

So, we have listened and made a number of changes to make public questions, statements and presenting petitions more accessible. This includes:

- **Virtual questions and statements** – you can ask verbal questions and make statements remotely (via Teams or equivalent)
- **Having your question or statement read out for you** – you can request for a verbal question or statement be made on your behalf (eg. a nominated person or by an officer)
- **Written questions** – you can submit a written question and receive a written response without having to attend a meeting at all.
- You will also still be able to attend a Council meeting in person, as you can now.

Full Council

Who attends?	84 Councillors and statutory officers
What is the meeting for?	<p>Sets the overall direction of the Council.</p> <p>Some important decisions can only be taken at Full Council, such as setting the Council's budget and deciding the Council's overall policies.</p> <p>The Council appoints the Leader and at its Annual Meeting in May appoints Councillors to serve on its Committees. It also appoints representatives to serve on joint bodies and external organisations.</p>
How often are they?	Six meetings a year plus Budget Council (March) and AGM (May), usually on a Wednesday afternoon.
How can I watch it?	<p>In person - the Public Gallery in the Town Hall Council Chamber can accommodate 50 persons. An overspill area will be provided in the event that more than 50 members of the public attend – the webcast of the meeting will be live streamed to that room</p> <p>Public-i - https://sheffield.public-i.tv/core/portal/home</p>

	Details	Deadlines	What happens at the meeting	What happens after the meetings
Written questions relating to the remit of Full Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On any issue for which the Council has responsibility or is relevant to the city Limit of 200 words – including questions with multiple parts Questioners able to notify of intention to ask one supplementary question (max 200 words) after 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 noon, six clear working days before the scheduled Full Council meeting (usually this will be the Monday of the week before the meeting) Written question responses will be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60mins allocated for questions, statements and petitions Written questions and answers will not be read out in the meeting as they are published online If time allows, supplementary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written responses to any supplementary questions provided and published within 10 working days.

	Details	Deadlines	What happens at the meeting	What happens after the meetings
	<p>reading published response to a written question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum of two participations per person in any council meeting (ie. Full Council or Policy Committees) 	<p>published 2 days before the meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplementary questions (max 200 words) must be submitted in writing by 12 noon on the day before the meeting. 	<p>questions may be asked verbally. No commitment to respond but relevant Policy Committee chair) reserves the right of reply.</p>	
Questions relating to the agenda of Full Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On issues relating to the published agenda for a specific Full Council meeting. • Agenda published 5 working days before a meeting. • 200 word limit – a question and any related sub-questions within a 200 word limit • Maximum of two participations per person in any council meeting (ie. Full Council or Policy Committees) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 noon, 3 days before a meeting - deadline for questions relating to the agenda / that couldn't be known at the point of deadline for written questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60mins allocated for questions, statements and petitions. • Verbal questions may be asked (in person / on screen) and responses provided by relevant Policy Committee Chair (or to be provided in writing if not possible by the meeting). • Verbal questions are asked at the discretion of Lord Mayor who will seek to ensure a fair representation of voices and issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses to any verbal questions that were not asked in Full Council due to time constraints provided in writing and published within 10 working days.

	Details	Deadlines	What happens at the meeting	What happens after the meetings
			within the allocated 30mins.	
Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements can be made on any issue within the remit of Full Council or in specific reference to agenda items • Maximum of 1 statement per meeting, per person • Maximum of 200 words / 60-90 seconds of speaking time • Maximum of two participations per person in any council meeting (ie. Full Council or Policy Committees) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 noon, 6 days for statements relevant to the remit of Full Council • 12 noon, 3 days for statements relating to the published agenda of Full Council • All statements published online the day before the Full Council meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60mins allocated for questions, statements and petitions • Maximum of 90 seconds of speaking time per person • Statements are presented at the discretion of Lord Mayor who will seek to ensure a fair representation of voices and issues within the allocated 60mins. • No commitment to responding to a statement however, the Lord Mayor or relevant Policy Committee Chair will reserve the right of reply in the meeting if deemed appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Petitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We welcome online and paper petitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A petition can be submitted to the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary Petitions: The petition organiser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can read our petition logs to look at

	Details	Deadlines	What happens at the meeting	What happens after the meetings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petitions can be organised or signed by anyone who lives, works or studies in Sheffield. • There must be at least 5 signatures for a petition to be valid. • There is a petitions scheme which provides a more detailed guide to submitting a petition • You can also start an e-petition through the council's website 	<p>Council, Policy Committees or Sub-Committees, Regulatory Committees and Area Committees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary Petitions: Advance notice by 9am at least 2 working days before the date of the meeting. • For petitions that trigger a debate at Full Council, we require seven working days' notice to be given prior to a Council meeting 	<p>will be given three minutes to present the petition at the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors will decide how to respond to the petition. • Debate Petitions: If a petition contains 5000 signatures or more, it will trigger a debate by the Full Council, in public, unless it is a petition asking for a senior Council officer to give evidence at one of the Policy Committees. 	<p>past petitions and what action we took in response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The petitions scheme sets out how the Council might respond to the petition.

Policy Committees

Who attends?	Elected Councillors proportionate to the overall make-up of the Council. Most Policy Committees currently have 9 Members. Strategy and Resources has 13.
What is the meeting for?	Policy Committees are responsible for developing policy, scrutinising and reviewing performance, and making decisions aligned to their remit. Policy Committees responsibilities are set by Full Council
How often are they?	Every 2 months
How can I watch it?	In person – our Policy Committees are all physical meetings and are open to the public. Meetings are normally held at Sheffield Town Hall All Policy Committee meetings are also live webcast via Public-I - https://sheffield.public-i.tv/core/portal/home

	Details	Deadlines	What happens at the meeting	What happens after the meetings
Written questions relating to the remit of the Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On any issue for which the Policy Committee has responsibility Limit of 200 words – including questions with multiple parts Questioners able to notify of intention to ask one supplementary question (max 200 words) after reading published response Maximum of two participations per person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 noon, six clear working days before the scheduled Committee meeting Written question responses will be published 2 days before the meeting Supplementary questions (max 200 words) must be submitted in writing by 12 noon on the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30mins allocated for questions, statements and petitions Written questions will not be read out in the meeting as they are published online If time allows, supplementary questions may be asked verbally. No commitment to respond but relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written responses to any supplementary questions provided and published within 10 working days.

	Details	Deadlines	What happens at the meeting	What happens after the meetings
	in any council meeting (ie. Full Council or Policy Committees)	day before the meeting.	Policy Committee chair) reserves the right of reply.	
Questions relating to the agenda of the Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On issues relating to the published agenda for a specific Policy Committee meeting. • Agenda published 5 working days before a meeting • 200 word limit – a question and any related sub-questions within a 200 word limit • Maximum of two participations per person in any council meeting (ie. Full Council or Policy Committees) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 noon, 3 days before a meeting - deadline for questions relating to the agenda / that couldn't be known at the point of deadline for written questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30mins allocated for questions, statements and petitions • Verbal questions may be asked (in person / on screen) and responses provided by the Policy Committee Chair (or to be provided in writing if not possible by the meeting). • Verbal questions are asked at the discretion of Chair who will seek to ensure a fair representation of voices and issues within the allocated 30mins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses to any verbal questions that were not asked in Committee due to time constraints k
Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements can be made on any issue within the remit of Policy Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 noon, 6 days for statements relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30mins allocated for questions, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

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	<p>or in specific reference to agenda items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum of 1 statement per meeting, per person • Maximum of 200 words / 60-90 seconds of speaking time • Maximum of two participations per person in any council meeting (ie. Full Council or Policy Committees) 	<p>to the remit of the Policy Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 noon, 3 days for statements relating to the published agenda of Policy Committee • All statements published online the day before the Policy Committee meeting 	<p>statements and petitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60-90 seconds of speaking time per person • Statements are presented at the discretion of the Chair who will seek to ensure a fair representation of voices and issues within the allocated 30mins. • No commitment to responding to a statement however, Policy Committee Chair will reserve the right of reply in the meeting if deemed appropriate. 	
Petitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We welcome online and paper petitions • Petitions can be organised or signed by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A petition can be submitted to the Council, Policy Committees or Sub-Committees, Regulatory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary Petitions: The petition organiser will be given three minutes to present the petition at the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can read our petition logs to look at past petitions and what action we took in response.

	Details	Deadlines	What happens at the meeting	What happens after the meetings
	<p>anyone who lives, works or studies in Sheffield.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There must be at least 5 signatures for a petition to be valid. • There is a petitions scheme which provides a more detailed guide to submitting a petition • You can also start an e-petition through the council's website 	<p>Committees and Area Committees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary Petitions: Advance notice by 9am at least 2 working days before the date of the meeting. • For petitions that trigger a debate at Full Council, we require seven working days' notice to be given prior to a Council meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors will decide how to respond to the petition. • Debate Petitions: If a petition contains 5000 signatures or more, it will trigger a debate by the Full Council, in public, unless it is a petition asking for a senior Council officer to give evidence at one of the Policy Committees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The petitions scheme sets out how the Council might respond to the petition.