

QUESTIONS TO ADMINISTRATORS POLICY AND PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

Policy

The objective of this policy is to facilitate the asking and answering of questions by members of the public at **scheduled** Council meetings in relation to a matter listed on **the relevant Council meeting agenda** or a significant strategic or governance matter affecting the City.

Procedural Guidelines

1. There are many ways that you can contact the Council to ask a question, receive a service or obtain information. You can contact us by telephone, by visiting the Council offices, by sending a letter or an email or by speaking with one of our staff out in the community. **Questions to Administrators time** at scheduled Council Meetings is but one method that residents and ratepayers have to formally contribute to public debate or seek to input to, and obtain feedback from, Council.
2. You are also welcome to contact the **Panel of Administrators**. The **Administrators have been appointed to perform the roles, responsibilities and functions of a Councillor which includes representing** residents and ratepayers of the City of Whittlesea and to make decisions on your behalf at Council meetings. **Details of how to contact the Administrators can be found on Council's website.**
3. The purpose of **Questions to Administrators time** is to facilitate the asking and answering of questions by members of the public at **scheduled Council meetings** in relation to matters listed on the **Council meeting agenda** or a significant strategic or governance matter affecting the City.
4. The answer that we give you at the Council Meeting is an interim reply only and the Council's official response **will be provided by either an Administrator or a Council Officer, on behalf of the Council**, generally within 5 working days of the Council meeting. The response will be provided in writing or any other reasonable form determined by Council **or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).**
5. Residents and ratepayers of the City of Whittlesea **may submit questions up to three hours prior to the advertised commencement time of a scheduled Council meeting.** Persons **who have submitted** questions **to the meeting are encouraged to identify** themselves when requested by the Chairperson to do so. If you are unable to attend the meeting for any reason, including because of an 'attribute' as defined in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (eg a disability) you may nominate a representative to attend on your behalf.
6. Regardless of whether you or your representative are able to attend the Council meeting, we will read out your question **(or a summary of your question)** and provide a response at the meeting and also record your question and the interim response in the minutes of the meeting subject to points 11, 12 and 13 of these Guidelines. **If you are not in attendance, you may view the response to your question/s by accessing the livestream of the Council meeting available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcZMqHKDQOM&feature=youtu.be>.** **Where available, live streamed Council meetings are also closed captioned.**

7. The schedule of Council meeting dates and times is available on the City of Whittlesea website - <https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/about-us/council/council-meetings/>
8. If you would like to ask a question at a Council meeting, your question should be in writing and in English unless this unreasonably prevents or hinders you from participating. If you are unable to provide your question in writing and/or in English and would like to make alternate arrangements, please contact the Council's Governance Team on 9217 2294 before the Council meeting to discuss the means by which you may submit your question to the Council meeting. If you do not speak English, we offer various language services to help you communicate with us including VITS and LanguageLinks. If you have a hearing or speech impairment you may use the National Relay Service.
9. We recommend that your question is submitted on the form available on our website (<https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/about-us/council/council-meetings/>) as this gives you space to record your contact details as well as your question. **Each question should be submitted on a separate form.**
10. A question must be received by:
 - leaving it at the **customer service** desk at the Council Offices **no later than three hours prior to the advertised commencement time of a scheduled Council meeting***; or
 - sending it by e-mail to info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au **no later than three hours prior to the advertised commencement time of a scheduled Council meeting.**

**Please check Council's website to confirm Council Offices are not closed to the public in light of the COVID-19 restrictions (or any other restrictions) in place at the relevant time.*
11. A time is set aside for **Questions to Administrators** during **scheduled meetings** of Council, in anticipation of you or your representative being present in person or by some other approved means. When we reach that time on the agenda, we will read your question (**or a summary of your question**) and provide an interim reply. When we read your question, we must be sure that it complies with these guidelines. The Chairperson reserves the right to summarise or précis your question when reading it out at the meeting and recording the question in the minutes of the meeting.
12. A question may be disallowed on the grounds that it:
 - is repetitive of a question already asked;
 - is defamatory or malicious;
 - does not relate to a matter on the Agenda for the meeting;
 - raises an issue of a confidential nature (see point 17); or
 - is asked to embarrass an **Administrator** or Council officer.
13. **Prior to the Council meeting the CEO, in consultation with the Chairperson, may disallow a question on the grounds outlined in point 12. When disallowing a question, the CEO may receive advice from Manager Governance in relation to potential grounds for disallowing the question.**
14. **Manager Governance, or their delegate, must advise the person who submitted the question that the question has been disallowed prior to the scheduled Council meeting, and the reason or reasons for the question being disallowed (unless it is impracticable to do so, or where clarification may, in the opinion of the decision-maker, cause Council to directly or indirectly breach contractual undertakings or offend relevant laws, guidelines, policies or procedures). Where time permits and where appropriate, Manager Governance or their delegate may contact the resident and work with them to revise their question to remove the ground or grounds for disallowing the question.**

15. The CEO must notify the Panel of Administrators of any public questions received prior to the scheduled Council meeting, including any questions which are disallowed under point 13.
16. The Chairperson may advise the meeting of a question received that has been disallowed and may provide reasons to the meeting as to why it has been disallowed but is not obliged to do so. Statements and opinions are not permitted during question time and will not be read at the meeting.
17. Where a question:
 - (a) relates to a matter to be dealt with in the confidential section of the Agenda; or
 - (b) is of a nature that would ordinarily be dealt with in the confidential section of the Agenda,the Chairperson may, without reading the question aloud, advise the person submitting the question that:
 - (i) the question will not be dealt with during the meeting; and
 - (ii) a written response will be provided as soon as is practicable.
18. The Chairperson will nominate the appropriate Administrator or Council officer to answer the question or elect to answer it himself/herself at the meeting. The text of the question or a summary and the response will be recorded in the minutes of the Council meeting. No debate or discussion of the questions or answers is permitted.