

Public Question Time Scheme of Operation
Report by Head of Governance and Executive Assistant

Summary:	This report provides an amendment to the Broads Authority's Public Question Time Scheme of Operation to facilitate the ability for members of the public to ask a question, make a statement or present a petition without being present at the meeting.
Recommendation:	That the Authority adopts the amended Public Question Time Scheme of Operation detailed in Appendix 1 for all Authority and Committee meetings.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 During its meeting on 23 October 2014 the Navigation Committee recommended that the Authority reviewed the Public Question Time Scheme of Operation and consider whether a question, statement or petition could be addressed at a meeting, without the requirement for the member of the public providing the question, statement or petition to be present.
- 1.2 The Public Question Time Scheme of Operation has been reviewed in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chair of the Authority and the Chairmen or the Committees. The tracked change amendment in Appendix 1 enables a member of the public to ask a question, make a statement or present a petition without being present at the meeting, which is in line with the practice being adopted by some local authorities. It also makes it clear that vexatious representations will not be included and details that the Information Commissioner's Office guidelines will be used to determine whether such representations are vexatious. The amendment also makes a link to the separate arrangements for public speaking at the Planning Committee to help provide a distinction between the two arrangements.
- 1.3 The amended Public Question Time Scheme of Operation will enable greater engagement with members of the public during the meetings of the Broads Authority and its Committees and it is recommended that members adopt the new scheme at Appendix 1 for all Authority and Committee meetings.

Background papers: Nil

Author: John Organ
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Broads Plan Objectives: None
Appendix: APPENDIX 1 – Public Question Time Scheme of Operation

Public Question Time Scheme of Operation

A member or members of the public may ask a question, present a petition or make a statement on any matter which relates to the business of the Broads Authority or any of its committees. Please note that this Scheme of Operation is not applicable for Planning Committee meetings. A separate scheme is open to the public for Planning Committee meetings, and applicants and objectors to development proposals may speak to the Committee under the Public Speaking at Planning Committee arrangements.

Twenty minutes are allowed at the beginning of Authority and Committee meetings (other than the Planning Committee) for dealing with public questions, petitions and statements.

If you would like to submit a question, petition or statement, written notice of at least four working days should be given to the Chief Executive providing the subject matter and the address and contact number of the person asking the question, presenting the petition or making the statement.

Petitions should include the nature and object of the petition. If a person wants to make a statement in support of or as background for their question or petition, this statement should be included.

The maximum time allowed for a statement will be three-five minutes.

Any questions, petitions or statements deemed by the Chief Executive (in consultation with the Chairman) to be vexatious, defamatory or which relate to a specific officer or member will not be included and the member of the public will be informed. The guidance provided by the Information Commissioner's Office concerning vexatious requests in relation to the Freedom of Information Act will be used to determine whether a question, petition or statement is deemed to be vexatious. In consultation with the person the Chief Executive (following consultation with the Chairman) may edit a question or statement to summarise the content or remove defamatory remarks.

~~The person must be at the meeting to ask the question, present the petition or make the statement. If they are unable to attend the meeting, the question, petition or statement will be withdrawn from the agenda. In such instances a written answer will be provided to any questions within 20 working days.~~

What happens in the meetings?

The Chairman ~~or Vice-Chairman~~ will invite the questioner to read his/her question and, where included within the written notice, allow them to make a statement explaining it. A prepared response will be spoken by the Chairman ~~or Vice-Chairman of the Authority or the relevant Committee Chairman.~~

The questioner may be allowed to ask a supplementary question which may be answered by the ~~appropriate Committee~~ Chairman or an officer if the necessary information is available. If not, a written answer will be provided within 20 working days.

Following questions, the Chairman will invite members of the public to deliver their petitions and, where included within the written notice, allow them to make a statement. Following delivery of petitions, the Chairman will invite statements to be read.

Except at the discretion of the Chairman there will be no debate during Public Question Time on question(s) and answer(s) provided, or petitions and statements presented. However, if members of the Authority meeting so decide, it may be agreed to refer the matter to the next appropriate meeting and request an officer's report.

If a member of the public is not able to attend the meeting to ask a question, present a petition or make a statement, these will still be represented to the meeting by the Chairman, together with the responses in the case of questions.

A record of questions and their replies, petitions delivered and statements made is recorded in the formal minutes of the meeting.