

In accordance with the Local Government (Meeting Procedures) Regulations 2015, a period of thirty minutes for “public question time” will be set aside at ordinary Council Meetings for members of the community to ask questions relating to Council activities.

Public question time provides an opportunity for people to ask questions about Council’s activities, not make statements. Anyone wishing to address Council and make a statement may do so under the Deputation section of the Council Meeting Agenda.

The procedures for the conduct of public question time at meetings of the Meander Valley Council are set out as follows:

Asking a question:

Anyone may ask a question. A person may ask a maximum of two questions per meeting. Questions may be submitted in two ways:

- They can be submitted in writing and be “put on notice” before the Council Meeting;
- They may be raised from the public gallery “without notice” during public question time.

Public Question Time - what happens at the meeting?

- Public question time will continue for no more than thirty minutes for ‘questions on notice’ and ‘questions without notice’.
- At the Council Meeting, public question time will be held early on the Council Meeting Agenda. This is usually shortly after the meeting commences.
- At the beginning of public question time, the Chairperson will firstly refer to the questions on notice. The Chairperson will ask each person who has a question on notice to come forward and state their name and where they are from (suburb or town) before asking their question(s).
- The Chairperson will then ask anyone else with a question without notice to come forward and give their name and where they are from (suburb or town) before asking their question.
- If called upon by the Chairperson, a person asking a question without notice may need to submit a written copy of their question to the Chairperson in order to clarify the content of the question.
- A member of the public may ask a Council officer to read their question for them.
- If accepted by the Chairperson, the question will be responded to, or, it may be taken on notice as a question on notice for the next Council meeting. Questions will usually be taken on notice in cases where the questions raised at the meeting require further research or clarification. These questions will need to be submitted as a written copy to the Chairperson prior to the end of public question time.
- The Chairperson may direct a Councillor or Council officer to provide a response.
- All questions and answers must be kept as brief as possible.
- There will be no debate on any questions or answers.
- In the event that the same or similar question is raised by more than one person, an answer may be given as a combined response.
- Questions on notice and questions without notice, and their responses will be minuted.
- Where a person does not give their name and where they are from, no record will be kept of any question/s or answer/s.
- Once the allocated time period of thirty minutes has ended, the Chairperson will declare public question time ended. At this time, any person who has not had the opportunity to put forward a question will be invited to submit their question in writing for the next meeting.

Notes

- Council officers may be called upon to provide assistance to those wishing to register a question, particularly those with a disability or from non-English speaking cultures, by typing their questions.
- The Chairperson may allocate a maximum time for each question, depending on the complexity of the issue, and on how many questions are asked at the meeting. The Chairperson may also indicate when sufficient response to a question has been provided.
- Limited Privilege: Members of the public should be reminded that the protection of parliamentary privilege does not apply to local government, and any statements or discussion in the Council Chamber or any documents produced are subject to the laws of defamation.

Putting a question with notice

Members of the public are encouraged to submit a question in writing and be put on notice to address the Council in the public question time. Council recommends this option, as it will enable Council to provide a more “well-researched” and complete response.

A maximum of two questions may be submitted in writing before the meeting.

To submit a question in writing, members of the public will need to fill out a question registration form. Forms are available online and at the Council office.

Forms will need to be lodged at the Council office no later than 5pm, 7 days before the scheduled meeting.

Question registrations forms can be lodged by:

- Mail: PO Box 102, Westbury, 7303
 - In person: 26 Lyall Street, Westbury
 - Fax: 03 6393 1474
 - Email: mail@mvc.tas.gov.au
- The registered questions to be answered at the Council Meeting will be listed on the agenda for the scheduled meeting.
 - Each person whose registration form has been accepted or declined will be advised by no later than the Friday of the week before the scheduled meeting.
 - When contacted, a person who has submitted a question registration form will need to confirm their presence at the meeting for their question to be read.
 - The name of the person asking a question on notice and the question will be included in the meeting agenda and minutes.

Questions without notice

- Priority will be given to questions with notice over questions without notice asked from the public gallery.
- Questions without notice will be dependent on available time at the meeting following ‘questions on notice.’ (Maximum 30 minutes for Parts 6 & 7).
- Questions without notice are permitted at the discretion of the Chairperson.
- Provided time is available, each person in the public gallery will be given an opportunity to ask one question without notice.
- Subject to available time and in the event that no other persons seek to ask questions without notice at the meeting the Chairperson may allow further questions from persons in the public gallery.

Questions may be refused in certain circumstances

The Chairperson may refuse to allow a question on notice to be listed or refuse to respond to a question put at a meeting without notice that:

- Relates to any item listed on the agenda for the Council meeting (note: this ground for refusal is in order to avoid any procedural fairness concerns arising in respect to any matter to be determined on the Council Meeting Agenda);
- is unlawful in any way;
- contains defamatory remarks, offensive or improper language;
- questions the competency of Council staff or Councillors;
- relates to the personal affairs or actions of Council staff or Councillors;
- relates to confidential matters, legal advice or actual or possible legal proceedings;
- relates to any matter which would normally be discussed in the closed section of the Council Meeting pursuant to *Regulation 15 of the Local Government (Meeting Procedures) Regulations 2015*;
- is, in the reasonable opinion of the Chairperson, proffered to advance a particular point of view rather than to make a genuine enquiry;
- is vague in nature or irrelevant to Council;
- is not related to Council activities; or
- is a question that has been substantively asked at the previous Council Meeting.