

What to expect when you attend an Area Committee/Public Question Time

Area Committees are the most localised committees within the Council's committee structure. Their duties are set out within the Council's [Constitution](#) (please see section titled "Scheme of Administration and Delegation", P69 of the constitution).

The law states that all meetings of the Council must be held in public although certain items under consideration may be confidential or commercial and press and public may be excluded for parts of the meeting. While public are welcome to attend all council meetings to observe, the debate and decisions are reserved for the members of the committee only.

To facilitate public engagement, the council's Area Committees routinely include an item on the agenda "Public Question Time". It is during this segment that public can engage by asking a question under the direction of the Chairperson. If you do attend an Area Committee, remember this is a formal committee of the Council and it must comply with its delegated powers, as well as Standing Orders.

In terms of meeting format it is normally the case that Public Question Time (PQT) is one of the first items on the agenda to allow questions to be submitted which the committee members may take into consideration when they discuss the item later in the meeting. Committee reports are available to view [online](#) 7 days in advance of meetings being held to allow time for both the committee members, press and public to read reports in advance. If the answer to any question is not evident within the report, or there is no item on the agenda (you may wish to see the section below on things to consider before submitting a question) then PQT is the time to raise that question. The format for PQT is:

- The Chair will invite any person attending who has submitted an advance question by email to the relevant Committee Clerk (see contact information below) to put their question to the meeting. If you do not attend then the Clerk will read this on your behalf.
- The Chair will invite a relevant officer to respond to the question, or will invite the Clerk to read out a response from the relevant Service.
- Once the officer has responded, should you have a follow up question then please alert the Chair or meeting Clerk by catching their attention. The Chair and Clerk will be keeping a note of the order of those who have indicated that they would like to speak and the chair will invite you to come back in at an appropriate time.
- After pre-submitted questions have been addressed, the Chair will invite anyone attending to ask their question, following the format above until there are no further questions outstanding.

For the avoidance of doubt, all dialogue should be directed through the Chair

Things to consider before submitting a question –

1. Remember that a question should be short and to the point. If you feel there is a need to provide any context, or to express views on behalf of a group or organisation on a matter which is before the meeting for final determination, it may be more appropriate to make a request for a deputation (for more information on deputations see Standing Order 18 (page 43) of the Council's [constitution](#))

2. Meetings of the Area Committee take place quarterly in the months of March, June, September and December. Could you obtain a quicker response by [emailing](#) (or calling 01546 605522) the Council's Contact Centre with your question? Response times are set out within the Council's [Customer Service Charter](#).
3. You should never delay reporting a problem you have encountered with council services. The easiest way to do this is via the website - [Report It | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)
4. Questions submitted by email in advance, and which relate to matters on the agenda, will have the best chance of being responded to as there should be an officer attending the meeting. Where no relevant officer is attending, the Clerk to the meeting will have been liaising with the service prior to the meeting in the hope of obtaining a response that they will read out. If there is not a response available, you will be provided with a written response after the meeting takes place.
5. If the question relates to a matter which may require a co-ordinated response with other agencies, consider whether the matter may be one for the Area Community Planning Partnership Groups.
6. Please bear in mind that a question which in part expresses dissatisfaction with the council's procedures, charges, employees, agents or quality of service may be more appropriately logged as a complaint. For more information about complaints please see the council's website - [Complaints | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#).
7. It is also possible to obtain information which is not routinely published by the council by making a Freedom of Information (FOI) request. Information is available on making an FOI request, and information on the council's publication scheme [here](#).
8. Please note that Area Committees are not able to take decisions on matters that are not set out on the agenda for the meeting. If the members of the committee feel further information might be required on the subject matter then they may request that a report be taken to a future meeting.

As a last point, questions which relate to policy matters or affect more than one administrative area are generally reserved matters for other committees and this may limit the ability of the area committee to progress matters you have raised. Other council meetings are live streamed and available to watch [here](#). If you have an interest in the items coming before any of the council's committees then you may wish to contact members of the committee who have a responsibility for the matter to set out your views and opinions. The Clerk to the Area Committee can provide some advice for you if you are unsure.

If you would like to take further information about committee governance, the Clerks to Area Committees are:

Bute & Cowal – Stuart McLean, Committee Manager, Stuart.Mclean@argyll-bute.gov.uk or 01436 658717

Helensburgh & Lomond – Stuart McLean, Committee Manager, Stuart.Mclean@argyll-bute.gov.uk or 01436 658717

Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands – Shona Barton, Governance Manager, Shona.Barton@argyll-bute.gov.uk, or 01436 657605

Oban, Lorn & the Isles – Melissa Stewart, Governance Officer, Melissa.stewart@argyll-bute.gov.uk or 01546 604331