

Public Questions Policy

1. General

- 1.1. Meetings of the Strategic and Accountability Boards are open to the public, unless confidential business is being discussed. The agenda pack and appendices are published on the SELEP website, (and the Accountable Body's (Essex County Council) website for the Accountability Board).
- 1.2. During every meeting of the Strategic and Accountability Board there shall be a period of up to 15 minutes to accommodate any questions submitted in accordance with the below. This period shall be at the beginning of the meeting except if the Chair deems it appropriate, then a question may be asked during a relevant agenda item.
- 1.3. If there is not sufficient time to ask the submitted question during a meeting, the question shall be answered in writing following the meeting, within 10 working days where possible.

2. Notice of questions

- 2.1. A question may be asked under this procedure only if it has been submitted in advance of the meeting in accordance with 2.2. below via the Public Submission Form, which can be accessed at <https://forms.gle/wWGSAVgtHBZCnYVM8>. If you are unable to access this form, please email hello@southeastlep.com for assistance.
- 2.2. Questions must be received by no later than 10:30am on the Monday before the meeting. If the question is received after this time, the question will be asked at the following meeting of the same Board.
- 2.3. The Secretariat shall circulate prior to the meeting a copy of the question(s) submitted by members of the public to Board members and supporting officers.
- 2.4. Any question may be withdrawn (but not amended) by the person who submitted it up to 1 hour before the meeting via email to hello@southeastlep.com.

3. Addressing the Board

- 3.1. Only one person will be permitted to speak in relation to a submitted question, and no more than one person from an organisation may speak during a meeting.
- 3.2. The name of the member of the public provided when submitting their question will be included, read out and published publicly alongside the question and response. If the member of the public would like to request to submit their question anonymously, they will need to email hello@southeastlep.com for assistance, and this will be decided at the Chair's discretion.
- 3.3. No person may ask more than the pre-submitted question at any meeting and there will be no opportunity for asking a supplementary question during the meeting.
- 3.4. If there is documentation that is pertinent to answering the question that cannot be contained with the submission form please contact hello@southeastlep.com for assistance. Written or photographic materials may not be circulated at the meeting in relation to a question without prior permission.
- 3.5. Questions will normally be dealt with in the order in which notice of them is received, except if the Chair decides to group together similar questions or address questions alongside a relevant agenda item.
- 3.6. If the member of the public wishes to ask the question themselves:

- 3.6.1. For meetings in person, on arrival and before the start of the meeting speakers should make themselves known to the Secretariat who will explain what will happen and show speakers to the public seating area.
 - 3.6.2. For virtual meetings, the Zoom registration information may be found on the SELEP meeting page. When appropriate the speaker will be given the ability to join as a panellist and use their camera and microphone.
- 3.7. If the member of the public does not wish to ask the question themselves or is not present when the question is to be read out, the question and response will both be read out by the SELEP CEO or their delegate.

4. Scope of questions

- 4.1. The Chair may reject a question if it:
- 4.1.1. is not about a matter for which the respective Board has powers or duties;
 - 4.1.2. is defamatory, frivolous, vexatious or offensive;
 - 4.1.3. is substantially the same as a question put to a meeting in the previous six months;
 - 4.1.4. will require the disclosure of confidential or exempt information; or
 - 4.1.5. is already subject to separate appeal, adjudication, litigation, mediation or dispute resolution.
- 4.2. Notification of rejected questions will be sent to the email address provided in the submission at the earliest opportunity and include reasons for rejection in accordance with 4.1 above.
- 4.3. Any Public Question submission must be less than 1800 characters (with spaces) in total, comprising of a maximum of 1500 characters (approx. 230-300 words) for contextual information and 300 characters (approx. 45-60 words) for the question itself. This is to ensure clarity and conciseness, and to enable the main meeting agenda items sufficient time.
- 4.4. The contextual information provided as part of the Public Question Submission must be necessary for the understanding of the question. If the contextual information includes extraneous information this will not be read out or included as part of the submission. The member of public should assume that the Board is aware of previous SELEP decisions and will not need to restate those in the Public Question Submission.
- 4.5. Any Public Question submissions may only contain one question, or one simple “yes/no” question followed by a closely-related follow-up question (for example, “Can the Board do XYZ? If not, why not?”).

5. Public Misconduct

- 5.1. The Chair may disallow or terminate any meeting participation of a member of the public which discloses confidential or exempt information or is inappropriate, abusive, indecent, discriminatory, frivolous, irrelevant or otherwise unacceptable.
- 5.2. If a member of the public interrupts a meeting or otherwise behaves inappropriately, improperly or offensively, the Chair may request that they leave the room or order that they are removed. In the event of a general disturbance, the Chair may suspend the meeting or direct that the public be excluded from it. No one so removed or excluded will be permitted to return to the meeting or to submit any future questions.

6. District/City/Borough Council Representatives at Strategic Board meetings

- 6.1. Leaders or cabinet members of a district/city/borough council in the SELEP area may join the Strategic Board table and take part in the discussion of an item, but not vote, under the following circumstances:
- 6.1.1. the Chair of the Strategic Board agrees that it is appropriate; and
 - 6.1.2. there is an item on the agenda that significantly affects their area.