

# Ask the Cabinet

Your guide to asking questions at Cabinet  
Meetings.

May 2008



*Epping Forest District Council*  
[www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Council has now extended an invitation to the public to ask questions at its Cabinet meetings.

The Cabinet is the body within the Council, which makes the important decisions affecting the District. It carries out the broad policies for providing services and manages the budget set by the Council.

The Cabinet consists of between 3 and 10 councillors, meetings of which are chaired by the Leader of the Council. Each of the Cabinet members holds a service portfolio, which is akin to a Central Government Ministry.

Although the number of Cabinet members can vary, as may the make up of the portfolios, any question on Cabinet responsibilities will fall to one member of the Cabinet to give a reply.

## **WHO MAY ASK A QUESTION?**

If you are a resident of the Epping Forest District, work in the District, own or operate a business in the District or use any Council services, you will be able to ask a question at a Cabinet meeting.

## **WHAT CAN YOU ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT?**

You can ask questions on any aspects of the Cabinet's business.

The Cabinet's business covers matters such as housing, refuse collection, planning policy (but not individual planning applications), Council Tax, Council budgets, Crime and Disorder (but not individual cases), car parking, some highway matters, graffiti removal, concessionary fares, benefits (but not individual cases), street sweeping, food, home and water safety, nuisances, leisure facilities (including sports centres and swimming pools), town centres, land drainage, grant aid, North Weald Airfield and the website.

Not all Council services are dealt with by the Cabinet. If you are unsure as to whether a question is one for the Cabinet, please contact Democratic Services in the Office of the Chief Executive who will advise.

Questions, which cannot be dealt with by the Cabinet, may be referred to meetings of the full Council, in which case you will be advised of the date of the next meeting.

## **WHICH QUESTIONS CANNOT BE CONSIDERED?**

The Cabinet will be unable to deal with questions about the following:

- (a) matters over which the Council has no control or responsibility;
- (b) individual planning applications, although general questions may be possible;
- (c) detailed issues for which time may not be available at Cabinet meetings and which would be better dealt with by letter;
- (d) matters which would lead to disclosure of personal or confidential matters about organisations or individuals;
- (e) questions which are offensive, vexatious or mischievous;
- (f) questions which are the same (or similar to) a question already answered in the previous six months; and
- (g) official complaints already being dealt with through the Epping Forest District Standards Committee, the Council's Complaints and Compliments Scheme, or by the Local Government Ombudsman;

- (h) personal matters relating to individual members and officers;
- (i) from individuals who are listed as vexatious correspondents.

## **HOW DO YOU REGISTER YOUR WISH TO ASK A QUESTION?**

You will need to contact the Office of the Chief Executive before 4 pm on the day of the Cabinet meeting. This can be by phone, letter or e mail. You should indicate your name, address and the subject of your question. You will then be registered to ask your question.

## **DO I HAVE TO SUBMIT MY QUESTION IN WRITING?**

No. All you have to do is to contact the staff in the Office of the Chief Executive and explain the question which you wish to raise. This is to ensure that your query is directed to the correct Cabinet member. They will take a few details and advise you of the meeting arrangements.

## **WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CABINET MEETING?**

Questions from the public will be dealt with early in the meeting, if possible before 7.30 p.m. You will be met outside the Council Chamber and conducted to seating reserved for those asking questions.

15 minutes have been allocated at each meeting for questions and the Leader of the Council, who will be chairing the Cabinet, will call each questioner to ask their question. The appropriate Cabinet member will be asked to reply.

The public will be called in the order in which the questions were registered. It is hoped that all questions will be dealt with during the 15 minutes allowed. If there is not time to do so, questions will be held over to the next meeting or dealt with by letter. The Leader of the Council will, however, exercise some discretion regarding extending the 15 minutes if this enables all questions to be dealt with.

### **CAN I ASK MORE THAN ONE QUESTION?**

Yes, you can ask a maximum of two questions. This is so that as many members of the public can take part in the time available.

You can seek clarification on the reply you are given to your question.

### **WHEN DOES THE CABINET MEET?**

The Cabinet usually meets on a Monday at 7.00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Epping. The dates are available:

- from the Council's website (democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk);
- from the Council's Information Centres at the Civic Offices, Epping, Traps Hill, Loughton, Waltham Abbey Town Hall, the Parish Offices, Queens Road, Buckhurst Hill and at Ongar Library; and
- from the Office of the Chief Executive (Telephone 01992 564470).

### **WILL I BE WEBCAST?**

The time allocated to public questions will be early in the meeting and will be webcast via the Council's website. If you intend to ask a question you should bear in mind that the webcast will be viewed by the public.

### **OTHER PUBLICATIONS WHICH MAY BE OF INTEREST**

#### **"Your Voice, Your Choice" -**

A guide to speaking at planning meetings.

#### **"More Questions than Answers" -**

A guide to asking questions at Council meetings.

#### **"Compliments and Complaints" -**

A Guide to how to complain to the Council.