



EMP-GOV-008 | Public Question Time

Strategic Context

Strategic Link	Policy Objective
☑ United ☑ Safe & Healthy ☑ Beautiful & Respected ☑ Prosperous & Equitable	The objective of this policy is to establish a clear and transparent framework for the conduct of Public Question Time, ensuring community participation is facilitated in a fair, respectful, and orderly manner consistent with legislative requirements and principles of good governance.

Introduction

1. The Shire of Halls Creek recognises the importance of open, transparent, and accountable local government. Public Question Time provides an opportunity for members of the community to engage directly with Council, seek clarification on matters of public interest, and participate in the democratic process.
2. As a formal component of Council and Committee meetings, Public Question Time supports informed decision-making and strengthens community confidence in local government. It enables residents and stakeholders to raise questions relevant to the business of the Shire in a structured and respectful forum.
3. This policy establishes a clear framework to guide the conduct of Public Question Time, ensuring that participation is fair, orderly, and consistent with legislative requirements, while maintaining the integrity and efficiency of Council meetings.

Purpose

4. The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and consistent framework for the conduct of Public Question Time at Council and Committee meetings of the Shire of Halls Creek.
5. This policy supports Council's commitment to transparency, accountability, and community participation by outlining how members of the public may submit and ask questions in accordance with legislative requirements and meeting procedures.
6. The Policy aims to ensure that Public Question Time is conducted in a fair, respectful, and orderly manner that:
 - a) facilitates meaningful community engagement;
 - b) provides clarity on Council processes and decisions;
 - c) protects the integrity of Council meetings; and
 - d) balances community participation with the efficient conduct of Council business.
7. This policy assists Elected Members in fulfilling their governance responsibilities while maintaining compliance with the Local Government Act 1995 and associated regulations.

Policy Scope

8. This policy applies to all Elected Members of the Shire of Halls Creek and governs the conduct of Public Question Time at Ordinary and Special Council Meetings, and Committee Meetings where Public Question Time is permitted.



9. The Policy applies to questions submitted or asked by members of the public in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995* and the Shire's meeting procedures. This includes:
 - a) written questions submitted prior to a meeting;
 - b) questions asked in person at a meeting; and
 - c) supplementary questions directly related to the original question.
10. This policy relates to the governance role of Council in facilitating community participation during formal meeting proceedings. It does not apply to:
 - d) informal enquiries made outside Council meetings;
 - e) complaints managed through the Shire's complaints handling procedures;
 - f) deputations or presentations to Council (which are subject to separate processes); or
 - g) operational service requests, which are managed by the Chief Executive Officer and Shire administration.
11. Public Question Time will be conducted in accordance with legislative requirements, the Council Meeting Procedures Local Law or Policy, and principles of fairness, respect, and orderly meeting conduct.
12. Where inconsistencies arise, legislative and statutory requirements prevail.

Policy Statement

13. The Shire of Halls Creek is committed to fostering open, transparent, and accountable local government. Public Question Time forms an important part of this commitment by providing members of the community with an opportunity to engage directly with Council on matters relevant to the Shire's functions and responsibilities.
14. Council recognises that Public Question Time strengthens democratic participation and community confidence in local government decision-making. It enables residents and stakeholders to seek information, clarify matters under consideration, and contribute to informed discussion in a structured and respectful environment.
15. Public Question Time will be conducted in a manner that is fair, orderly, and consistent with legislative requirements. Council will ensure that all participants are treated with respect and that meeting integrity is maintained, while balancing the need for meaningful community participation with the efficient conduct of Council business.

Principles Underpinning the Policy

Principle Name	Principle Definition
Transparency and Openness	Council is committed to transparent decision-making and open access to information, enabling the community to understand and engage with matters affecting the Shire.
Democratic Participation	Public Question Time supports democratic governance by providing residents and stakeholders with a formal opportunity to engage directly with Council.
Respect and Dignity	All participants in Public Question Time, including Elected Members, employees, and members of the public, are entitled to be treated with courtesy, respect, and fairness.
Orderly and Efficient Meeting Conduct	Public Question Time must be conducted in a structured and orderly manner to ensure Council meetings remain efficient and focused on their agenda business.



Equity and Fair Access	Council will provide fair and consistent opportunities for participation, ensuring that Public Question Time processes are applied equitably and without discrimination.
Legislative Compliance	Public Question Time will be conducted in accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> , associated regulations, and the Shire's meeting procedures.
Governance and Role Clarity	Elected Members will respond to questions in a manner consistent with their governance role, respecting the separation between Council oversight and operational responsibilities of the Chief Executive Officer and administration.
Integrity and Accountability	Responses provided during Public Question Time should be accurate, responsible, and reflective of Council's adopted positions, supporting public confidence in local government.

Definitions

Term	Meaning
Administration	The Chief Executive Officer and employees of the Shire of Halls Creek responsible for the operational management of the organisation.
Council Meeting	An Ordinary or Special Meeting of Council convened in accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> .
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	The person appointed by Council under section 5.36 of the <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> , responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Shire.
Committee Meeting	A meeting of a committee established by Council under the <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> , where Public Question Time is permitted.
Elected Member	A Councillor or the Shire President elected or appointed to the Council of the Shire of Halls Creek.
Local Government Act 1995	The primary legislation governing local government operations and responsibilities in Western Australia.
Member of the Public	Any person attending or participating in a Council or Committee meeting who is not an Elected Member or employee of the Shire.
Public Question Time	The portion of a Council or Committee meeting during which members of the public may ask questions in accordance with legislative requirements and meeting procedures.
Presiding Member	The Shire President or other person authorised to preside over a Council or Committee meeting in accordance with the <i>Local Government Act 1995</i> and the Shire's meeting procedures.
Supplementary Question	A follow-up question asked during Public Question Time that directly relates to the original question asked.

Policy Details

16. Public Question Time

- 16.1 Public Question Time is held early in the agenda of any meeting of the Council that is open to the public and generally runs for a minimum time of 15 minutes, however this can be varied. If there are more questions than time permits, then the Chairperson may allow the forum to operate for a longer period.
- 16.2 The Chairperson will decide when the public question time will end after the 15-minute period.
- 16.3 The Public Question Time aims to precede the discussion of any matter that requires a decision to be made by Council, the aim of which is to ensure that questions be directed, in the first instance, to matters to be discussed by Council at that meeting.
- 16.4 Questioners who wish to ask a question will be given an equal and fair opportunity to ask the question and receive a response. Where possible, responses to questions will be supplied at the meeting where the question is made. Answers may be provided by Council employees, but this will be decided on by the Chairperson.
- 16.5 Questions on matters listed in the Council's agenda for that meeting will be given priority and persons wishing to ask Questions will be requested to come forward and provide their name and their question.
- 16.6 The question will be responded to, taken on notice, or not accepted by the Chairperson. Statements are not to be made or read out as it is QUESTION Time, and the public is asked to ensure the material presented is a question. The Chairperson will not permit the Public Question Time as an arena for debate on any matter.
- 16.7 Each member of the public is to be given equal opportunity to ask questions, and therefore they will each be permitted to ask only three (3) questions initially.
- 16.8 If time permits, the Chairperson could allow individuals to ask further questions, after all members of the public have had the opportunity to put questions.
- 16.9 The Chairperson will not take questions that:
- a) Are offensive or defamatory in nature and would potentially expose the Local Government to legal action for republishing defamatory remarks (the person may be invited to rephrase their question).
 - b) Contain offensive language
 - c) Question the competency of Council members, employees, or associated persons.
 - d) Relate to the personal affairs or actions of Council members or employees.
 - e) Relate to confidential matters, legal advice or legal proceedings; or
 - f) Have been answered by earlier questions, or questions at a previous meeting.

17. Record of the Question and Answer

- 17.1 There is a statutory requirement for a summary of both the question and the response given during Public Question Time to be recorded in the minutes. Where questions are taken on notice, the question will be recorded, and a written response provided to the questioner as soon as possible.
- 17.2 Where a question is taken on notice, the question will be included in the Minutes of the Meeting at which the question was asked.
- 17.3 For reasons of clarity, the question will also be repeated in the Minutes of the Meeting in which the response is recorded. The name of the person who asked the question will also be included in the summary.



Accountability

18. Council is accountable for ensuring that Public Question Time is conducted in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995*, associated regulations, and this policy. Council must maintain a transparent and inclusive forum for community participation while ensuring that meeting proceedings remain orderly, respectful, and effective.
19. The Presiding Member is responsible for managing and facilitating Public Question Time in a manner consistent with legislative requirements and meeting procedures. This includes ensuring questions are addressed appropriately, determining whether questions are in order, maintaining respectful conduct during the meeting, and exercising discretion in applying reasonable time limits to ensure fair access for participants.
20. Elected Members are responsible for responding to questions in a respectful, accurate, and responsible manner consistent with their governance role. In doing so, Elected Members must maintain the distinction between strategic oversight and operational matters managed by the Chief Executive Officer and the administration. Elected Members are also required to uphold the standards of conduct set out in the applicable Code of Conduct.
21. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for ensuring that appropriate administrative processes support Public Question Time, including the coordination of written questions, preparation of responses where required, and maintenance of accurate records in accordance with legislative and recordkeeping requirements. Operational matters raised during Public Question Time are to be managed through established administrative processes.
22. Members of the public participating in Public Question Time are responsible for complying with meeting procedures and directions of the Presiding Member. Questions must be asked respectfully and relate to matters within the Shire's functions and responsibilities.
23. This shared accountability framework supports transparent governance, structured community participation, and the integrity of Council meeting processes.

Related Documentation / Legislation

Legislation	Shire of Halls Creek Documentation
a. <i>Local Government Act 1995 (WA)</i> <i>Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996 (WA)</i> b. <i>Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007 (WA)</i> c. <i>Freedom of Information Act 1992 (WA)</i> d. <i>State Records Act 2000 (WA)</i>	a. EMP-GOV-001 - Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates b. Records Management Policy c. EMP-GOV-013 – Behaviour Complaints Management Policy - d.

Policy Review

24. This policy will be reviewed every two (2) years, or earlier if required due to legislative change, audit findings or a resolution of Council.



Document Control

Relevant delegations	Nil		
Risk Evaluation	Moderate		
Council adoption	24/09/2026	Resolution	2026/105
Previous Title	G6 Council Meetings – Public Question Time		
Reviewed	13 December 2012 (Resolution no. 2012/195) 17 April 2014 (Resolution no. 2014/014) 15 June 2017 (Resolution no. 2017/058) 17 June 2021 (Resolution no. 2021/066) 28 July 2022 (Resolution no. 2022/071) 27 July 2023 (Resolution no. 2023/___)		
Next review due	September 2028		