STANDING ORDERS

Section 13 - Public Questions Procedure

a General – Members of the Public who are Council Tax paying residents of the Township of Spennymoor, may ask Questions of Council at ordinary meetings of the Council and its two main standing committees.

b Order of Questions – Questions will be asked in the order the notice of them was received. The Town Clerk (in consultation with the Spokesperson of the Majority Group of the Council) will direct the question to its most appropriate Standing Committee and inform the Chairman of that Standing Committee forthwith.

c Notice of Questions – Apart from the Annual Town Meeting (Meeting of Electors), a question may only be asked if notice has been given by delivering it, in writing or by electronic mail, to the Town Clerk, not later than midday, on the Friday before the appropriate Committee meeting. All questions must be accompanied by the name and address (and where applicable a telephone number and email address) of the questioner.

d Number of Questions – No person or organisation may submit more than two questions per Council or Standing Committee Meeting. Where questions are received from different questioners or organisations, but are substantially the same, they will be taken together and answered as such.

e Scope of Questions – the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Spokesperson of the Majority Group of the Council or Chair of the relevant Committee, may reject a question if it:

* Is not about a matter for which the Council has a responsibility or which affects the Town;
* Is defamatory, frivolous, mischievous or offensive;
* Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council or Standing Committees of the Council in the past six months;
* Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information, or,
* Is directed towards an individual Member of the Council

f In all cases, the reason for the rejection of a question will be given to the Questioner within 7 working days of receipt and said rejection recorded in the file kept for Public Questions.

g Record of Questions – The Town Clerk will record each question received and the requisite information about the questioner in a file. This file will be open to the public. Rejected questions will be included in the file, along with the reason for their rejection. Copies of approved questions and the information about the questioner (in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Acts) will be circulated to all Members as part of the Agenda of the Council or Standing Committee. This information will also be available to Members of the public. Any reply made will be recorded in said file.

h Asking the Question at the Meeting – At the appropriate point in the business of the Meeting, as indicated on the Agenda of the Meeting, the Town Mayor or the Chair of the appropriate Standing Committee of the Council will invite the questioner to put the Question to the Meeting. If the questioner is not present, the Town Mayor or chair of the Meeting will decide either to put it, on his/her behalf, or that the Question not be dealt with. If required, the Town Clerk, other Officer of the Council and/or the Chair of the meeting will make a reply on behalf of the Council. This may be verbal or written, as decided by the Chair of the Meeting, in consultation with the Town Clerk. The answer to the question, either verbal or written will be recorded in the Minutes of that Meeting and in the file containing Public Questions.

I Supplemental Question – A questioner (who has put a question in person) may also be allowed to put one Supplemental Question, without notice, to the Council. A Supplemental Question must arise directly out of the original Question or its reply. The Chair of the Meeting (with advice from the Town Clerk) may reject the Supplemental Question on the grounds referred to in Standing Order 13e, give a verbal reply to the Meeting, or a written reply within 7 days, or both. The matter of the Public Question will then rest.

j Written Answers – any question which cannot be dealt with during public question time will be dealt with by a written answer.

k Reference of Question to a Committee – Once a Public Question has been heard and answered there will be no further discussion on it, but any members may move that the matter be referred to the next appropriate Standing Committee Agenda. If seconded, such a motion will be voted upon without discussion.

l The Town Mayor at a meeting of the Council, or the Chairman of the Council Committee or Sub-Committee, where the meeting is in the public session, has the discretion to allow a member or members of the public to speak on a particular item before a vote is taken.