

Mr Parker



Date: 22 December 2009
Our ref: CP/WACQ
Your ref: PW

This matter is being dealt with by:

Paul Wood, Democratic Services Officer, Chief Solicitor, Office of the Chief Executive, PO Box 100, Civic Centre, Sunderland, SR2 7DN. Telephone Number: 0191 5611044. Email: paul.wood@sunderland.gov.uk

Dear Mr Parker

QUESTION TO AREA COMMITTEE

We are in receipt of your question form which you would like to be put before the Washington Area Committee in which you asked:

When members of the public are invited to put questions to Councillors at meetings, why is the protocol for their questions different to the protocol for the councillors? Surely if they have been asked to attend then they should be given the same opportunity.

The two groups have very different roles, and, in contrast to members of the general public, Councillors serve as elected members of the Committee and work within Committee rules, with the remit of investigating the needs of the local area, to find ways of resolving local issues and improving services.

The Question to Area Committee protocol is being piloted at the request of Members as a new avenue for members of the public to highlight and assist in identifying possible gaps in services or problems for the community that the Committee may be able to address in the area.

As meeting time is limited it is necessary to manage use of time at the Committee to make sure each agenda item is considered. Given the time constraints, full discussions cannot ensue when a question is first asked, although Members may ask questions for points of clarification. The person submitting a question may also ask one supplementary question.

If the issue raised has an effect on the whole of the area, has not already been addressed by the Authority and is of a nature that the Committee could resolve, further investigations are made outside of the Committee and brought back to a future meeting for fuller consideration.

If a member of the public wishes to make an individual complaint over a particular service that the Authority provides, the Council also has a complaints procedure in place. This is a more suitable avenue for raising an issue, where it is not one that affects the wider community.

In relation to the overall protocol for meetings of this Committee, members of the public are welcome to attend the meetings and at the discretion of the chair, may be invited to make relevant comments in relation to the items on the agenda.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wood
for Chief Solicitor

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