



Public participation in formal council and committee meetings

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Policy on public participation in formal meetings

Background

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council recognises its responsibility to promote the democratic process and to listen, consult, inform and respond to the local community through many different forms of community engagement and communications.

One way in which the Town Council engages with the community is by listening to representations about items on the agenda at any meeting and receiving formal questions at Full Council meetings.

Objective

The objectives of this policy are:

- 1** To encourage and promote public attendance at formal council and committee meetings and participation in the public speaking part of the meeting
- 2** To provide clear information for members of the council and the public about the rules to be followed concerning public speaking at meetings

Scope

The policy applies to formal meetings of the full council and its committees and sub-committees whether these are conventional meetings of the council held with all participants in one room or whether they are hybrid meetings of the council held online and in a meeting room.

Full Council and Committee Meetings

- 1** Meetings of the Town Council and its committees are not public meetings; they are meetings held in public so that the community can observe the decision-making process. There is no requirement in law to provide an opportunity for the public to question the council or make spoken representations at a meeting but the council welcomes the opportunity to provide a short public speaking session at all formal meetings.
- 2** The public speaking time will take place near the beginning of the meeting.

- 3 At committee meetings members of the public may make representations about items on the agenda only.
- 4 At full council meetings members of the public may make representations about items on the agenda and may also ask questions of the council which need not be about items on the agenda.
- 5 A member of the public who wishes to make a spoken representation or ask a spoken question at a specific meeting should notify the clerk to the meeting by noon on the working day **before** the day of the meeting. Speakers should provide contact details and ideally a copy of the question to be asked (full council only) or the subject of the agenda item on which they wish to address the meeting.
- 6 The clerk will contact the member of the public to make arrangements with them. In the case of hybrid meetings, the clerk will liaise with members of the public who wish to make representations remotely this will not always be possible as some meeting rooms do not have hybrid facilities.
- 7 The period of time designated for public participation at a meeting in accordance with standing order 3(e) above shall not exceed **15** minutes unless directed by the chair of the meeting.
- 8 Subject to standing order 3(f), a member of the public shall not speak for more than **3** minutes.
- 9 Generally, members of the public will be asked to speak in the order in which the council received written requests for participation. However, the chair of the meeting may determine in what order members of the public will be allowed to speak and whether questions to be asked are the same or similar to other questions already asked or answered.
- 10 The chair of the meeting will ensure that all members of the public are heard politely and without interruption and shall ensure that guidelines on abusive or offensive remarks or intemperate language are observed.
- 11 In accordance with standing order 3(e), a question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The chair of the meeting may direct that a written or spoken response be given. If a spoken response cannot be given a written response shall be provided within one week of the date of the meeting.
- 12 After the defined period of 15 minutes the public may not participate at any other time during the council meeting except in exceptional cases when the meeting, by formal resolution, agrees to suspend standing orders to allow a member of the public to

speak.

- 13 A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct his comments to the chair of the meeting.
- 14 Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. Groups of people who wish to make representations or ask questions should nominate one speaker.
- 15 Photographing, audio-recording, use of social media and filming at physical meetings is permitted from the public seating area during public meetings; we ask that, as a courtesy, prior notice of this intent is provided to the clerk before the commencement of the meeting. Reasonable facilities will be provided for this and for the press to take reports.
- 16 All meetings open to the public may be recorded by the council. Hybrid meetings held online may be live streamed on social media and members of the public who participate should be aware of this fact. The minutes of the meeting will record whether any public participation has taken place. Names of members of the public and their addresses will not be recorded in the minutes.