Overview and Scrutiny Public Participation Scheme

Speaking at Overview and Scrutiny Meetings

Bracknell Forest Council is committed to encouraging greater public participation in its work. This includes providing opportunities for the public to be involved and engaged with the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) process, which is the principal means of ensuring transparent, democratic accountability for the running of the Council.

This public participation scheme allows members of the public to speak at meetings of the O&S Commission and O&S Panels, under the control of the Chairmen of the meetings. The scheme gives members of the public the opportunity to tell Councillors directly about the things that concern them. All issues raised by the public under this scheme will be given careful consideration.
The information below explains when you can speak and what will happen at the meeting.

When is public speaking permitted?

Speaking is only permitted when:

1. A written notification (including by email or fax) of a request to speak at the Commission or Panel meeting is received by Democratic Services by 1200 noon at least three clear working days prior to the meeting;
2. The notification indicates the subject to be raised and the name of the person who intends to speak;
3. The subject is judged by the Council to fall within the Scheme (see below). Subjects will be excluded only in exceptional circumstances, and the reasons for rejection will be explained.
4. The time provided for public speaking has not been over-subscribed for the meeting in question. If it has, the Chairman will decide whether to curtail or defer questions to the following meeting, or exceptionally to lengthen the time for public speaking.

What will happen at the Commission or Panel meeting?

1. The speakers must attend the meeting and report to the Democratic Services officer not less than 15 minutes prior to the start of the meeting.
2. Copies of questions or statements received will be circulated to members of the O&S Commission or Panel concerned, and will be made available to members of the public who attend the meeting.
3. Once the meeting has reached the agenda item on subjects raised by the public, the Chairman will invite each registered speaker in turn to speak for 3 minutes to outline his/her views. This time limit will be strictly enforced.
4. The speaker will not be allowed to ask supplementary questions of Councillors, officers or others at the meeting.
5. The Members of the Committee may ask the speaker, through the Chairman for clarification of any points raised.
6. The Chairman may choose to ask Council officers to comment on any points raised before the Commission or Panel proceeds with its deliberations.

What falls outside the scheme?

Some matters fall outside the scope of this scheme. These are:

1. Personal circumstances where it would not be appropriate for details to be aired in open session.
2. Individual complaints. The Council has a corporate complaints procedure which must be accessed instead.
3. Matters appropriate to one of the Council's regulatory or decision making bodies.
4. Other issues of any kind which have been formally published and where specific arrangements are made for the public to express their views.
5. Matters unrelated to the remit of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Commission or Panel.
6. The Chairman may also reject a submission if it:

    - is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the Borough;
    - is defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
    - is substantially the same as a submission which has been put to and considered by a meeting of the O&S Commission or an O&S Panel in the past six months;
    - is about the subject of an appeal or review procedure that has not yet been concluded; or
    - requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

How do I arrange to speak at the meeting?

To speak at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting you must register with the Council's Democratic Services section by 12 noon at least three clear working days before the day of the meeting.

Speakers are registered on a "first- come" basis and the Chairman will decide on the maximum number of speakers in the light of time available (usually a maximum of 20 minutes). Consequently, it cannot be guaranteed that everyone who applies will be allowed to speak.

The register of speakers is kept by the Democratic Services section at Easthampstead House, and the names of speakers will be publicly available at the appropriate O&S meeting.

To register, you must be resident in the Borough of Bracknell Forest, or a representative of a business operating in the area of the Authority. You must contact the office at Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell, or on 01344 352000 during normal office hours. You must give your name, address, daytime contact number, your agreement that your name can be published and a summary of the subject to be raised. To assist you, a form is available on our website.

The Scheme is not open to employees of the Council wishing to make representations in that capacity. Employees' rights as private citizens to use this scheme are preserved. Only one person may speak about each submission at the meeting.

In the case of a statement on behalf of an organisation or more than one person, you must identify the organisation and others who are party to the submission.

What do I do at the meeting?

If registered to speak, you must arrive at the meeting venue, which will usually be the Council Chamber at Easthampstead House, at least 15 minutes before the start of the meeting of the Commission or Panel, and report to the Democratic Services Officer who will be present. If you fail to do this, you may not be permitted to speak.

When the Commission/Panel reaches your item, and depending on the time available, the Chairman may call you to speak. You must behave appropriately for a meeting of a local authority, showing courtesy and respect for everyone else present, and not make any remarks which are insulting, offensive, defamatory or inflammatory. You should limit your speaking to three minutes, and you must cease speaking whenever instructed to do so by the Chairman.

The Chairman of the meeting may allow a discussion and questions to be raised on your statement.

The prospect of speaking at a formal meeting of the Council may be daunting for the public. All reasonable help and support will be made available to those who wish to use this scheme, including allowing you to use the PA system in the Council Chamber. The Councillors and Officers present will treat members of the public with courtesy and respect. If you have any special needs, please advise officers of this at least one working day before the meeting.

What happens after the meeting?

The members of the O&S Commission or Panel concerned, or officers, may contact you afterwards to seek your further input. You will be informed of any action taken.

Where is the meeting?

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission meets every two months and the O&S Panels meet every three months, usually at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber at Easthampstead House.

View information about Overview and Scrutiny at Bracknell Forest.

Car parking is usually available at Easthampstead House in the evenings.

Further Information

For further information, or to register for public speaking, please contact:
Customer Services
Democratic Services
Bracknell Forest Council
Easthampstead House
Town Square
Bracknell
RG12 1AQ
Tel: 01344 352000

Email: customer.services@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

NB: Our busy hours are between 9:30am and 11:30am.