

Scheme for Public Participation at Meetings of the Council

1. Why have a scheme?

The Council is committed to encouraging greater public participation in its work. This scheme will give members of the public the opportunity to tell Councillors directly at meetings of the Council about the things that concern them.

All issues raised by the public under this scheme will be given careful consideration.

While it will not be possible, in every case, to resolve an issue to the satisfaction of everyone, the Council will ensure that the issue is considered fairly.

2. What can the public do?

The public may use this scheme to make a submission to Councillors at a meeting of the Council in one of four ways:

(a) Petition

To present a petition at a Council meeting in order to request the Council to deal with any particular issue within the community. There is no minimum number of signatures.

(b) Question

To ask a question at a Council meeting. This may be addressed to the Mayor, a Member of the Executive or a Chairman of a Committee or Sub-Committee. The question must be about a Council Service, or a topic relevant to the Council.

A questioner who has put a question in person may also put one supplementary question, without notice, to the Member who has replied to his or her original question. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply. The Mayor may reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds in Paragraph 4 below.

(c) Statement

To make a Statement to a Council meeting about a Council Service, about something the Council has or has not done, or about a matter of local interest or concern.

(d) Deputation

To present to a Council meeting, a Deputation calling for action by the Council, registering a view about something the Council has or has not done, or about a matter of community interest.

A Deputation may only be made on behalf of an organised group of residents or other interested parties.

3. Relevance to the Council

The content of any form of submission must be about something that is within the Council's responsibilities. This includes matters of interest to the Council as a community leader.

4. What falls outside the scheme?

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

- Individual's circumstances where it would not be appropriate for details to be aired in open session;
- Applications for legal consents where alternative procedures exist for the public to offer views; and
- Other proposals of any kind which have been formally published and where specific arrangements are made for the public to express their views.

The Chief Executive 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 a meeting of the Council 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.

5. Number of submissions

At any one meeting, no person may make more than one submission and no more than two submissions may be made on behalf of one organisation or group.

6. Notice of Submission

A submission may only be made if notice has been given by delivering it, in writing, or by electronic mail, to the Head of Democratic and Registration Services, no fewer than **six** clear working days (the date of the Council meeting and the date of giving Notice shall not count as clear working days) before the day of the Council meeting. A question must be set out, in full, and a written summary of all points to be raised in any other form of submission must be provided. This will ensure that time is available to prepare advice for the meeting, an individual Councillor or the person making the submission. Each submission must give the name and address of the person who will make the submission at the meeting and, in the case of questions, must include the name, or office, of the Member of the Council to whom it is to be put.

7. Advice on Content

The Head of Democratic and Registration Services will be available to give advice to the public about the content of their submissions and the process. The Head of Democratic and Registration Services will also give advice to the Mayor and Members on such matters as necessary.

8. Who can use the Scheme?

The Scheme is open to any resident in the area covered by the Authority. The Scheme is also open to a representative of a business operating in the area of the Authority.

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 or Deputation on behalf of more than one person, the Notice should identify others who are party to the submission.

9. At which meetings may submissions be made?

Any submission under this scheme may be made at any ordinary meeting of the Council other than the Annual Meeting.

10. Support for the Public

The prospect of speaking at a formal meeting of the Council may be daunting for the public. Every help and support will be made available to those who wish to use this scheme. The Councillors and Officers present will treat members of the public with courtesy and respect.

11. Time Limits

No individual submission will be allowed more than three minutes at a meeting. This rule will be strictly enforced in fairness to all those who wish to address the meeting.

The overall time allowed at a meeting to hear and deal with submissions from the public will be decided by the Mayor, or by the meeting itself, but will not normally exceed thirty minutes. This will take into account the issues to be raised in the submissions, the number of submissions and the other business of the meeting.

Submissions will be heard in the order notice of them was received, except that the Mayor may group together similar matters. Where there is insufficient time to deal with all submissions received, the Mayor will decide which submissions should be dealt with at the meeting. Any submissions not dealt with will be formally received by the meeting and a written response will be given as soon as possible after the meeting.

12. Balance

The Mayor will ensure that those who are making submissions on opposite points of view on the same subject are treated equally as far as possible.

13. How will submissions be dealt with at the meeting?

Details of all submissions will be printed on the agenda for the relevant meeting. If the subject matter of the submission is already on the agenda for the meeting, the meeting will be prepared to defer consideration of the submission until that item on the agenda is reached.

If necessary, and convenient to the other business, the Mayor or the meeting itself will agree to advance that item in the order or proceedings.

The Mayor will invite the member of the public to address the meeting for up to three minutes. If the submission is in the form of a question, the Mayor will invite the Questioner to put the question to the Member named in the Notice. If a person who has made a submission is unable to be present, they may ask the Mayor to present the submission to the Council on their behalf. In the case of a question, the Mayor may ask the question on the Questioner's behalf or indicate that a written reply will be given. In any case the Mayor may decide, in the absence of the person making the submission, that the submission will not be dealt with.

14. Councillors' Questions on Submissions

Councillors will be allowed up to five minutes to ask solely factual questions of the person making each submission. This is included in the thirty minutes normally set aside for dealing with submissions.

15. Written Answers to Questions

Any question which cannot be dealt with during the allocated time, either because of lack of time or because of the non-attendance of the Member to whom it was to be put, will be dealt with by a written answer. Written answers shall be sent to the Questioner and copied to all Members of the Council.

16. Action the Meeting May Take

In the case of a question, the Councillor named in the Notice will reply, or in his or her absence, the Mayor may ask another Councillor to reply. The reply will count against the thirty minute time limit. A written reply may be given where this is more convenient and can be circulated at the meeting.

Unless the submission relates directly to an issue to be dealt with at the meeting, petitions will normally be referred for consideration by the same, or another body, within the Authority on a report from Officers.

In the case of Statements and Deputations, the meeting will decide on the most appropriate course of action, which will be either to note the submission or to request an Officer report to a subsequent meeting of the Executive or appropriate Committee or Sub-Committee on the issue raised.

Any Member may move that a matter raised by a submission be referred to the executive or the appropriate committee or sub-committee. Once seconded, such a motion will be voted on without discussion.

17. General Information

This scheme will be reviewed and adjustments made from time to time.

The public are welcome to attend Council, Executive, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings where open business is discussed, but may not speak to the meeting. All such meetings will be held in accommodation that has reasonable access and seating for the public. A summary of public rights of access to information is contained in the Access to Information Procedure Rules available for inspection at the Council offices, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell.