

Deal Town Council Policy for Public Participation at Meetings of the Council

Introduction

The council meets and makes its decisions in public and is committed to community engagement and therefore would like to encourage members of the public to attend meetings and contribute within this public forum.

However, a council meeting is not a public meeting; it is a meeting held in public and there is no requirement in law to provide an opportunity for the public to question the council.

This protocol exists to ensure that the public forum is conducted politely and in a structured, unemotional way that comes to a conclusion within a reasonable timeframe.

Meetings shall be open to the public unless their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons. The public's exclusion from part or all of a meeting shall be by a resolution, which shall give reasons for the public's exclusion.

There will be an agenda item for Public participation for all committee meetings; this will be the opportunity for members of the public to discuss with councillors items that are listed on the agenda. The public will be allocated 15 minutes in total for this.

Public Participation procedure

- a) The right to speak on items listed on the agenda is available to any member of the public.
- b) Before the start of the meeting they should indicate to the Chairman or the Clerk their desire to speak and the item they wish to speak on. They will be heard in order, for a maximum of three minutes each and for a maximum of fifteen minutes in total at any meeting of the Council.
- d) The public may only speak once on a topic or issue listed on the agenda for that night.
- e) The public may, at their own expense, prepare and distribute to Councillors background papers regarding their comments; these must be given to the Town Clerk prior to the meeting for distribution.
- f) The public may not use intemperate or foul language.
- g) The public may not make insulting or offensive remarks to, or about, any person or identifiable groups or persons.
- h) Any person speaking at a meeting shall address his/her comments to the Chairman only and not individual Councillors.
- i) The Chairman will respond or instigate further actions as directed by the Council.
- j) If more than one member of the public wishes to speak about the same matter the Chairman may request that a spokesperson is nominated to address the matter on behalf of the individuals.

The Chairman of the Town Council Meeting

- a) Shall ensure that members of the public are heard in the correct order.
- b) Shall ensure that the public are heard politely and without interruption.
- c) Shall ensure that the guidelines on abusive and offensive remarks and foul or intemperate language are observed by the members of public.

The Councillors

- a) Shall listen to elector's addresses with the good manners without interruption.

Outcomes and Feedback

- a) Members of the public should note that the council is only allowed to take decisions committing the council on topics that are publicised on the agenda. Therefore, the council will not enter into any substantive discussion on a question raised if it is not on the agenda.
- b) The Chairman may direct that a response to a question posed by a member of the public be referred to a Councillor for an oral or written response or to an officer for a written or oral response.

- c) The Chairman may decide to carry the matter forward for inclusion on a future agenda depending on whether the questions needs further investigation by Town Clerk on behalf of the Council.
- d) Individual Councillors may propose that a topic or issue addressed by an elector be placed on the next agenda of the Town Council or be referred to a committee of the Town Council.
- e) The speaker will receive a verbal response at the time of the meeting from the Chairman of what action the Town Council can and will take on the matter.

How can a member of the public get an issue on to a council agenda for discussion?

Deal Town Council will consider requests from electors whose name appears on the current Register of Electors for Deal Wards. They must write to the Town Clerk no later than 7 days before the date of the council meeting, emails are also accepted.

The Town Clerk will consider the request and advise the elector within 3 days of receipt if it will become an agenda item and at which meeting.

The Clerk may reject a question/statement if it:

- is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the Town of Deal.
- is defamatory, frivolous or offensive;
- is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; or
- requires the disclosure of confidential information.