

 <p>BROADSTAIRS & ST. PETER'S TOWN COUNCIL</p>	<p>Public Participation at Council Meetings Policy</p>
	<p>BROADSTAIRS & ST. PETER'S TOWN COUNCIL Adopted by Council on Monday 11 July 2022 Reviewed: November 2025 Approved: 24 November 2025 min 748</p>

Broadstairs and St Peter's Town Council welcomes members of the public to its meetings and encourages their attendance in order to increase interest in the proceedings of the Council and foster greater transparency.

Members of the public have a legal right to attend decision-making meetings of the council and its committees except where they are excluded for specific items which need to be addressed in confidence (eg staffing matters or tenders for contracts). However members of the public have no legal right to speak at meetings of the council or its committees and so when they're allowed to do so it is considered a privilege. Broadstairs and St Peter's Town Council's Standing Orders 3 d-k state that a member of the public may speak subject to certain rules. The Council sets time aside for public participation during which members of the public may make a representation, contribution, suggestion or ask a question.

Neither councillors nor officials are under any obligation to respond immediately or at all to comments or questions made during public participation. The chairman's decision to allow a question or require an answer to be given will be final. Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto the council agenda.

It is recognised that some members of the public may abuse the opportunity to speak. While the chairman will endeavour to ensure an answer to a question this may be refused if continuous representations are made or repetitive questions asked.

Members of the public should not heckle or otherwise disrupt and must respect the rulings of the chair. As per the Council's Standing Orders if a person disregards the request of the chairman of the meeting to moderate or improve their conduct any councillor or the chairman of the meeting may move that the person be no longer heard or be excluded from the meeting. The motion if seconded shall we put to the vote without discussion.

Rules

1. A maximum of nine minutes will be set aside for public participation at council and committee meetings.
2. Members of the public may make representations, answer questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda. The conduct of public participation will be regulated by the Chairman having regard to the guidelines set out but with the right of discretion reserved.
3. The Chairman's decision on the relevance of a representation or question and on the method of dealing with any issue in connexion with this procedure will be final.

This includes the Chairman's decision to allow a representation or question or require an answer to be given.

4. Questions must be clear and concise and be relevant to matters for which the council has powers or duties. Only one question may be asked by any member of the public and the question must relate to a single topic.
5. If a large number of people wish to speak on one topic the chairman will ask for single representative to be appointed.
6. Questions, representations, contributions or suggestions should not:
 - a) contain offensive expressions or be personal or verbal attacks on any staff or member of the council.
 - b) divulge or require the answer to divulge confidential or exempt information.
 - c) repeat questions or representations previously asked earlier meetings unless there has been a material change of circumstances.
7. Questions may only be asked of the Chairman.
8. The following process will apply at the meeting:
 - a) the Chairman will invite representations to be made or questions to be asked at the meeting
 - b) the Chairman will invite the member of the public to address the meeting from the front of the council chamber.
 - c) up to a maximum of three minutes per person will be allowed to address the meeting.
 - d) the Chairman shall decide on whether or not a response is appropriate and if so shall respond or invite a councillor or officer of the council to respond which may take the form of
 - a direct oral response
 - where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work a reference to that publication or
 - where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written response circulated later to the questioner and made available to all members of the Council and to the public.
9. The timing of questions and responses is controlled by the Chairman and Town Clerk
10. No debate will be allowed on any question or the response thereto with the exception of planning meetings where councils may ask questions for clarification.
11. Any person excluded from a meeting will forfeit the opportunity of addressing any meeting for a period of 12 months or until such time as the Council may decide otherwise

Other ways to ask questions

Members of the public should be aware that rather than bringing questions to the entire Council and other members of the public during public question time, questions may also be addressed during business hours to the Town Clerk's office or via the Mayor or your ward councillors. These methods of communication are encouraged when more detailed dialogue is required than three minutes allow. The Council meeting is not the correct forum for conducting longer debates between councillors and members of the public.