

SANDWICH TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS
Protocol for Public Participation

1. 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, but this council welcomes the opportunity to engage the public in consultation.

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

Sandwich Town Council's ordinary and quarterly meetings will usually take place on the last Monday of every month at 6pm in the Council Chamber, Guildhall, this is subject to bank holidays.

Committee meetings take place throughout the month, the schedule of which can be found on the Council's website or by enquiring at the Guildhall.

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.

2. The Electors

a) The option to speak is available to any elector whose name appears on the current Register of Electors.

b) Written notice of the desire to exercise the right to speak must be given to the Town Clerk prior to 4pm two days (excluding Sundays and Bank Holidays) before a meeting (i.e on a Friday when the meeting is on a Monday).

c) If the elector reports the topic on which they wish to speak in advance of the agenda being issued (three clear days before a meeting excluding Sundays and Bank Holidays) the matter will also be included on the agenda for the meeting so that a decision can be made. The elector reserves the right not to report in advance what they wish to discuss; however, they should then be aware that if the matter is not on the agenda no decisions of the Council can be made.

d) Electors may speak on any topic or issue that has a bearing on the life of any one or more inhabitants of the town of Sandwich, regardless of the Council's power, or lack of power, to act upon the topic or issue addressed.

- e) Electors may speak extempore or read from a prepared speech, according to their wishes.
- f) Electors may, at their own expense, prepare and distribute to Councillors background papers regarding the topic of their choice, but may not use any other audio-visual aids.
- g) Electors may not use intemperate or foul language.
- h) Electors may not make insulting or offensive remarks to, or about, any person or identifiable groups or persons.
- i) Electors shall, on request, be entitled to know in general terms, whether the Town Council has the power to act upon the topic or issue, which has or will be addressed.
- j) Any person speaking at a meeting shall address his comments to the Chairman only and not individual Councillors.
- k) Electors will be heard in strict order of notification, for a maximum of three minutes each and for a maximum of fifteen minutes in total at any meeting of the Council.

3. The Town Clerk

- a) Shall ensure that a record is kept of the date and time of each elector's notification of the desire to exercise the right to speak as follows:
 - I) For notifications delivered in person the date and time of receipt.
 - II) For notifications received by mail, or by any other means, the date and time that the notification was first identified.
- b) Will provide the person(s) exercising their right to speak with a copy of this protocol and written confirmation that they are expected at the next Town Council meeting.
- c) Provide information to the electorate on whether a matter is within the remit of the Council.
- c) Shall present the list of public speakers to the person chairing the meeting of the Town Council.
- d) Will include in the minutes a record of the public participation session and the actions agreed therein.
- e) Will respond or instigate further actions as directed by the Council.
- f) If more than one member of the public wishes to speak about the same matter the Town Clerk may request that a spokesperson is nominated to address the matter on behalf of the individuals.

4. The Chairman of the Town Council Meeting

- a) Shall ensure that electors entitled to speak are heard in the correct order.
- b) Shall ensure that the electors 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 electorate.

5. The Councillors

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

6. 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 unable to answer the question correctly.
- 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 employee 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. The Town Clerk will then confirm this response in writing to the speaker within five days.

This document was adopted by the full council on 23rd July 2012.
Amended 20th May 2019
Amended 16th December 2019