



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICY

1. Background

- 1.1 Billingham Town Council (the Council) is committed to being open and transparent in the way decisions are made, recognises its responsibility to promote active engagement with the democratic process and welcomes public attendance at Council meetings.
- 1.2 Meetings of the Council are not public meetings, they are meetings held in public for which the community can observe the decision making process (Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 and Local Government Act 1972 ss 100 and 102). There is no requirement in law to provide an opportunity for the public to question the Council or make oral representations at a meeting however, the Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a short public speaking session at all formal meetings.
- 1.3 Public participation is not an appropriate time for members of the public to complain about general problems such as the routine maintenance of facilities. Members of the public should contact the Town Clerk about such issues. Public participation is also not to be used to demand information that is already available to the public or will be made available in accordance with statute or to raise matters which are not within the control of or relevant to the Council.
- 1.4 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.

2. Objective

- 2.1 The objectives of this policy are:
 - (i) To encourage and promote public attendance at Full Council and committee meetings and participation in the public speaking part of the meeting;
 - (ii) To provide clear information for members of the Council and the public about the rules to be followed concerning public speaking at meetings.

3. Full Council and Committee Meetings

- 3.1 Meetings are 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.
- 3.2 The public speaking time will take place near the beginning of the meeting agenda so that councillors may take into account views expressed when reaching decisions.
- 3.3 At Full Council meetings, members of the public may make representations about items on the agenda and may also ask questions of the Council which need not be about items on the agenda
- 3.4 At committee meetings, members of the public may make representations about items on the agenda only.
- 3.5 Written questions received in advance of the meeting are encouraged but not essential: if provided in advance, this will make it easier for an answer to be prepared. If questions are not provided in advance then members of the public should be aware that the Council may be unable to answer those questions and will need to defer that topic to a future date. Members of the public wishing to ask a question should, if possible, provide the wording of the question to the Town Clerk by no later than 2 working days before the Council meeting.
- 3.6 The period of time designated for public participation at a meeting, in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, shall not exceed 15 minutes unless directed by the Chairman of the meeting.
- 3.7 Subject to the Council's Standing Orders, a member of the public shall not speak for more than 3 minutes.
- 3.8 A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct their comments to the Chairman of the meeting.
- 3.9 Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the Chairman of the meeting shall direct the order of speaking. Groups of people who wish to make representations or ask questions should nominate one speaker.
- 3.10 In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, a question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The Chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response

be given. If an oral response cannot be given, a written response shall be provided within one week of the date of the meeting.

- 3.11 Members of the public are asked to respect the fact that Council meetings are called to conduct Council business and interruptions during Council business are not allowed and will not be permitted. If, in the opinion of the Chairman, the business of the meeting is disrupted in any way, the Chairman will ask the person/s causing the disruption to be quiet and if they refuse or persist, will ask them to leave.