

New Councillor – Public Meeting Protocol

The following information provides some “dos and don’ts” guidance to help make it easier for you when attending your first public meetings as a Councillor.

Whilst you may have attended public meetings at the Town Hall or Oakenshaw Community Centre prior to being elected, the aim of these notes is to provide you with a few handy hints to help you feel comfortable when participating in your first public meetings as a Councillor. This will make life easier for you and also for officers that support those meetings and the public observing them.

Five working days prior to the meeting you will receive an electronic link which will give you notice of the items on an agenda. These notes are based on a standard agenda pack and will go through each item and give you pointers in how you can help those meetings run smoothly for everyone concerned. A key element of this is for you to read the agenda prior to the meeting and for you to ask for clarification, from the relevant officer(s), on any areas you don’t understand, prior to it, to save time and potentially any embarrassment at the actual meeting.

Please note that the Council has adopted a position whereby it is assumed that all Members will be paperless unless you notify Democratic Services that you would like to receive paper copies of agenda packs. Agenda packs can be accessed electronically using the modern.gov app. There will be a training session in respect of how to use the app at a meeting in early June and all Members are encouraged to attend this session to learn about how to use the app.

There will be a mock Council meeting on the evening of 22nd June 2026. This will provide new Members with an opportunity to learn further about the protocol for Council meetings, some of the terminology and different scenarios that might occur. All new Members are strongly encouraged to attend this session.

1. Apologies for Absence and any named substitutes

If you are aware in advance that you are unable to attend a meeting, you should let the supporting Democratic Services Officer know prior to the start of the meeting. If you are able to provide a substitute to attend in your place, then you should also let them know who will be attending in advance of the meeting in order for them to be provided with access to the agenda in good time for them to prepare for the meeting. Please note, for some Committee, there are named substitutes appointed by your group at the Annual Council meeting. If you need to double check who the named substitutes are for your group, please contact Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

If you suddenly find you are not able to attend at the last minute and are unable to get in touch with the Democratic Services Officer, if possible, please let another member of the Committee know in order for them to give your apologies.

If your apologies are not given at the meeting, you will be marked as absent. This information will appear in your meeting attendance statistics which is displayed under your profile on the Council’s website.

2. Declarations of Interest

It is important that you check the items to ensure that you have no declarations of interest which need to be declared at the meeting. If you are in any doubt then you should, prior to the meeting, contact the Monitoring Officer to discuss the position and

to seek advice. Do not leave this until the actual meeting as it may be something which needs to be clarified in advance or further investigation may need to be undertaken to establish the position, which would be difficult and inappropriate to do within the meeting environment.

If you wish to declare an interest at a meeting you should do so “through the Chair” – put your hand up to indicate you wish to speak and the Chair will take such requests in order and when it is your turn, will invite you to speak.

When declaring an interest, please make it clear as to which item on the agenda the interest refers, whether the interest is a pecuniary one or a disclosable one and whether you will be leaving the room for the debate on the item. The responsibility rests with you as a Councillor when deciding on whether to make any declarations.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Chair will ask if everyone is happy that the minutes are an accurate reflection of the previous meeting. It is important to note that any discussion is around the accuracy and not an opportunity to go back and debate the topics discussed at the previous meeting nor do Members consider matters arising at formal Council and Committee meetings. The Chair will then ask for a proposer and seconder for the minutes, and then take a vote (this is done by members raising their hands “for” or “against” the accuracy of the minutes). Please note that Members do not have to have been present at a meeting in order to vote on the accuracy of the minutes.

Please note that the minutes are a record of the previous meeting which is intended to summarise the discussions held at that meeting. The Democratic Services team do not take verbatim minutes and do not tend to attribute particular comments to particular Members, unless they have proposed / seconded a recommendation or presented a report or Members have specifically requested during the meeting that a particular point they have made is included in the minutes.

Should any issues be identified with the accuracy of the minutes of the previous meeting, these will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which the issues have been raised. Where you identify problems with the accuracy of the minutes of a meeting, it would be helpful if you could raise this with the relevant Democratic Services Officer in advance of the following meeting of that Committee.

4. Reports for discussion at the meeting

The Chair will invite the relevant lead officer to present the report or to give a presentation (it will be stated on the agenda what format this will be) and it is often suggested that questions from Members are taken at the end of that presentation, although you can indicate to the Chair (by raising your hand) throughout that time if you have a question or point that you would like to make. The Chair will then take these in the order they have been made. It maybe that your question is answered later in the presentation, so it would be helpful to make a note of any queries you have as the presentation progresses.

The report/presentation may simply be for information or to note. However, there will be occasions where there are recommendations that Members have been asked to consider agreeing, which will be detailed within the report. These will need to be proposed and seconded and then voted on – as detailed in the next paragraph. You can also make an amendment to any recommendations that are within a report.

If it is a subject where you think you would like to make a recommendation about a particular area, please ensure that you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve from a recommendation and clear wording that you would want to use in order for it to be recorded in the minutes. It may well be useful to have this prepared as you will be asked if you have a seconder for the recommendation that you are proposing; it may be appropriate for you to discuss it with a colleague prior to the meeting to ensure you have support for it.

If your proposed recommendation is seconded there will be a discussion around it and an opportunity for you to put your case forward or to respond to questions from other members. Once this has been completed the Chair will put the matter to the vote and all members will be asked to vote "for" or "against" it.

If this is a matter which you feel strongly about and would like the way in which people vote to be recorded within the minutes, then, before it is put to the vote you must request through the Chair that a recorded vote is taken. The process for this is that the supporting officer will read out each member's name and they will be asked whether they are voting, for, against or abstaining from the vote. The numbers for each category are added up and announced by the supporting officer, who will clearly state the position. This will then be recorded within the minutes of the meeting and on the Council's website.

Please note that only members of the Committee, including named substitutes, can participate in the vote or propose and second recommendations. Legally, Members are required to be present in person at formal Committee meetings in order to take part in the debate and vote thereon.

5. Amendments

At Council meetings, Members have an opportunity to speak on a Motion, including a recommendation, once in the debate. However, if an amendment to that Motion/recommendation is proposed and seconded during the debate, Members who have already spoken on the substantive motion can speak again during the debate on the amendment.

Please note that, if the vote on the amendment is carried, it becomes the substantive Motion. If the debate on an amendment is lost, the debate returns to consideration of the substantive (original) Motion.

6. Executive and Council Decisions

There are some decisions that can be taken by the Executive Committee and some decisions that are taken by Council. The responsibility for various Council functions is set out in relevant legislation and also in Parts 2 and 3 of the Council's constitution. Some functions by law are Executive decisions, some are Council decisions and for some areas the local authority determines whether the Council or the Executive Committee will make the decision.

The Council advertises all forthcoming decisions due to be taken at meetings of the Executive Committee in the Executive Committee's Work Programme. This should clarify whether the decision due to be taken can be determined by the Executive Committee alone or whether it might also need to be referred to Council for consideration. If you are uncertain about which body can make a decision on a particular subject, please contact the Monitoring Officer or the Principal Democratic Services Officer in advance of a meeting.

In the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings, decisions taken by the Executive Committee will be listed as having been resolved. Where the Council needs to make the decision, this will be listed in the Executive Committee minutes as a recommendation. Whilst all sets of Executive Committee minutes are considered at meetings of Council, Members can only debate and vote on recommendations from the Executive Committee, including any proposed amendments to those recommendations, during Council meetings. Members cannot, at a Council meeting, change a resolution determined at a meeting of the Executive Committee.

7. Exempt Information

There will be some reports that contain exempt, or confidential, information. This information should have a watermark stating "restricted" or "confidential". The content of exempt pages in the agenda pack should only be discussed in exempt session (this means in private with the public having first been asked to leave the meeting). Reports containing exempt information are usually included at the end of an agenda to avoid disrupting the public.

If you would like to ask a question about the exempt information in a report, you should only do so once the meeting has gone into exempt session. If the meeting is in public session, you need to put your hand up and explain to the Chair/Mayor that you would like to ask a question about the exempt information. The Chair/Mayor will then ask Members to vote to go into exempt session. Once this vote has taken place, please do not ask your question until the Democratic Services Officer has confirmed that the meeting has been secured and all members of the public have left the room. If the meeting is being live streamed, questions should not be asked about the exempt information until the Democratic Services Officer has confirmed that the stream has been suspended.

Even once a meeting has taken place and decisions have been taken, exempt information should continue to be treated as confidential. Members should take care at all times to ensure that you do not share this exempt information with anybody other than elected Members and relevant senior Council Officers. Paper copies of exempt papers should be disposed of in confidential waste bins at the Town Hall.