

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS POLICY

Reference	SNTC/	Adopted by	FULL COUNCIL
Prepared by	C Robson (Town Clerk)	Adopted date	25 October 2022
Monitored by	Town Clerk	Minute reference	TC-98-22-23
Monitoring Review	Every four years	Review date	October 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 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 discussed in confidence (e.g. staffing matters or tenders for contracts). Members of the public have no legal right to speak at meetings of the Council or its committees, although it is considered good practice to provide residents with the opportunity to do so.
- 1.2 St Neots Town Council wishes to provide residents with different opportunities and ways to engage with the Council on matters of importance to them. As such the Council welcomes public participation at Full Council and Committee meetings. This policy sets out guidance, reflecting the Town Council's Standing Orders, surrounding participation by members of the public at meetings.

2. PROCEDURE

- 2.1 Public participation will be included in all Town Council agendas except for any Grievance, Disciplinary and Appeals Committees (/Sub-Committees) that may take place; it is at this time in the meeting where members of the public may speak to address the Council.
- 2.2 Public participation takes place near the start of the meeting immediately after declaration of interests to make everyone aware if a member has a prejudicial interest. The time for public participation shall be outlined on the agenda.
- 2.3 Councillors with a prejudicial interest in an agenda item may speak during public participation (and then leave the room when the item is considered).
- 2.4 Councillors who attend, but do not sit on a committee may speak during the public participation.
- 2.5 Only one person is permitted to speak at any time. The member of public should raise their hand when wishing to speak; the Chairperson will decide the order in which members of the public speak. When speaking they should sit and use the table and microphone provided.

- 2.6 Members of the public wishing to make comments on a specific planning application or an agenda item being considered by a committee may be invited by the Chairperson to do so immediately before each application is considered, rather than during the public participation agenda item. The Chairperson may change the order of business on the agenda to take an item a resident wishes to speak on earlier in the meeting. This will be at the discretion of the Committee Chairperson. (Standing Order 10, a. vi)
- 2.7 Members of the public will be given a maximum of three minutes each to speak. Public participation shall ideally take no longer than 10 minutes in total.
- 2.8 To take part in public participation you must be present at the meeting to ask your question or make your statement.
- 2.9 Other than when invited to do so by the Chairperson, members of the public are not permitted to speak at the meeting as this confuses the roles of councillors, who participate in the meeting, and members of the public who observe it. If there is a possibility that a large number of people will wish to speak, the Chairperson will encourage people not to repeat comments made by earlier speakers or ask for a single representative to be appointed.
- 2.10 The public have a legal right to attend Council and committee meetings but do not have a right to disrupt them. Members of the public should not heckle or otherwise disrupt and must respect the rulings of the Chairperson.
- 2.11 As per the Council's Standing Orders if person(s) disregard the request of the Chairperson of the meeting to moderate or improve their conduct, any councillor or the Chair of the meeting may move that the person be no longer heard or be excluded from the meeting. The motion, if seconded, shall be put to the vote without discussion.
- 2.12 Where it is necessary to exclude the press and public from a meeting, this shall be done by resolution with a reason for the exclusion given.
- 2.13 Ultimately, the Chairperson controls and has order over the meeting in accordance with Town Council policy.

3. QUESTIONS

- 3.1 Any comments made or questions asked should be directed at the Chairperson. You should state which agenda item (where relevant) your question is regarding.
- 3.2 Questions should be clear and concise and be relevant to matters for which the Council has powers or duties.
- 3.3 Questions or statements made at Committees must be related to an item on the agenda and not general matters. Questions or statements at Full Council meetings can be on any reasonable matter.

3.4 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 at earlier meetings unless there has been a material change of circumstances.

3.5 Every effort will be made to give a response at the meeting, where required; a summary of any response given will be included in the minutes of the meeting, which will be published on the Town Council's website.

3.6 A verbal response may be provided to you by the Chairperson, a councillor or Town Council officer, through the Chairperson. The public participation section does not provide an opportunity for Councillors to ask questions or enter into discussion with the Member of the public. The exception to this is when grant applications and planning applications are considered, where Councillors will be able to ask questions of speakers directly.

3.7 Members of the public will not have an automatic right to reply to the response given; the Chairperson may consider a request to reply if made, however this is likely to only be granted if new information is being provided.

3.8 Neither councillors nor officials are under any obligation to respond immediately or at all to comments or questions made during public participation. The Chairperson'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.

4. OTHER WAYS TO ASK QUESTIONS

4.1 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 by 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 long debates between councillors and members of the public

5. GENERAL NOTES

5.1 Please note that audio and video recording of Town Council meetings is welcomed providing that the Town Council's guidelines are observed. Said guidelines can be found in the public gallery at meetings or on the Town Council's website.

5.2 Any member of public wishing to submit a petition should refer to the Town Council's Petition Policy, which is available on the Town Council's website.



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- 5.3 Standing Orders 3 sets out the Town Council's rules regarding public participation at meetings; this policy is a reflection of these rules. [SNTC-Standing-Orders-26-June-2022.pdf \(stneots-tc.gov.uk\)](#)