

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

POLICY

And Guidance

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| REVIEW by: | Dec 2025 |

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

Meetings of the Parish Council are not public meetings, but members of the public have a statutory right to attend meetings of the council as observers.

They have no legal right to speak unless the Parish Council Chairman authorises them to do so.

However, as part of its community engagement, Cornforth Parish Council has set out a time for public participation, this is usually as Agenda Item number four when members of the public are invited to speak.

Members of the public should not be involved in the decision-making of the Council.

This guidance tells you:

* What kind of questions or statements can and cannot be asked or made.
* How questions or statements should be submitted.
* What will happen at the Council meeting.
* What will happen after the meeting.

**What kind of questions or statements can and cannot be asked or made?**

Generally, members of the public will be able to ask questions or make statements of no more than 100 words –

* ***On any matter in relation to which the council has powers or duties or which affects the parish.***
* ***On any matter in relation to an agenda item, that is not of a confidential nature.***

The Public Question Time, however, should not be used to bypass the ordinary processes of the council.

Most issues can be resolved simply by contacting your own Parish Councillor or the Clerk.

**Queries or complaints from individuals about council services they receive will therefore not be allowed unless the matter has first been raised with: -**

* the Clerk or
* any Councillor or
* the relevant Committee of the Council

**To ensure that the system is not misused or abused, and to comply with legal limitations on information which the council may divulge, the following rules shall apply:**

1. No more than six questions or statements on the same subject per year are allowed.

2. The same question or statement cannot be asked or made more than once.

3. Questions or statements on matters which are exempt or confidential under the 1985 Access to Information Act (as amended 2018) are not permitted.

4. Questions or statements which are defamatory, frivolous, or offensive are not allowed.

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 Chair may be unable to answer those questions and delay a response until a few days after the meeting.

**How should questions/statements be submitted?**

1. A question or statement must be accompanied by the name and address of the person submitting it (and a daytime telephone number if possible). Either in written format or via email.

2. If a question or statement is ineligible, the person submitting it will be advised of this before the meeting and given the reason. The content of questions or statements deemed ineligible will not be published and you will not be allowed to ask the question or make the statement during the Public Question Time.

3. Questions and statements should be submitted to the Clerk **three clear working days** before the Council meeting (excluding the day of the meeting and the day the question/statement is submitted)

If a question or statement is not submitted in time for the next Council meeting, it will automatically be submitted to the following meeting unless the person submitting it indicates otherwise.

4. The Clerk will send copies of the question or statement to the relevant Councillor(s) via email prior to the meeting if possible.

**What will happen at the meeting?**

* Having submitted a question or statement and been told that it will be presented at the next meeting, you should then come to that meeting and put your question or statement in person. If you cannot attend for any reason the Clerk will present your question and a response will be provided to you if required.
* At the invitation of the Chairman of Council, you may then read out the question or statement and, if you wish, speak for a maximum of three minutes by way of explanation. To ensure that questions and statements are dealt with fairly, persons will be invited to address the Council in the order in which they submitted their question or statement. If you submit more than one for a particular meeting, others will be given the chance to speak before you can put your subsequent question(s)/statement(s).
* You may only, however, put the question which has been submitted and you will not be permitted to raise other matters or make a speech.
* As the maximum amount of time allowed for each question and answer will be 6 minutes (3 for the presentation of the question and 3 for a response), it would be advisable to be brief. The longer you take to introduce your question, the less time will be available to answer it.
* Eligible statements will receive a response from the Chairman at the meeting, if possible, if this is not possible a response will be provided within 7 working days via email or ten working days by post.
* You may not question or seek to involve yourself in issues being raised by other participants.
* Any questions or statements which cannot be dealt with in the time allowed for Public Question Time will be given priority at the next Council meeting unless the persons who submitted them indicate otherwise.
* The reason(s) for disallowing any questions and statements submitted for a particular meeting will be publicly stated at that meeting.

**What will happen after the meeting?**

The content of your question or statement will be published in the minutes of the meeting together with any response given and a copy will be forwarded to you in your preferred format.

**Role of Chair:**

All communication shall be through the Chair. Councillors may not address questions raised by members of the public except through or with the permission of the Chair. Members of the public may not address individual councillors except through, and with the permission of the Chair.

The Chairman of the Council has absolute discretion regarding the interpretation of this scheme and its temporary suspension, variance, or withdrawal at a particular meeting if this would be conducive to the debate or if it becomes, or threatens to become, disruptive to the conduct of the meeting or the proper and lawful exercise of the council’s statutory powers and duties.

Offensive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. If a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of any meeting the Council reserves the right to curtail the contribution of that person and exclude a disorderly person.

**Public Question Time**

**Checklist**

1 Is it a matter you should first have taken up with the clerk or your local Councillor?

2 If it is, it will not be dealt with at the Public Question Time, so contact the clerk in the first instance.

3 If you are not satisfied, speak to your local Councillor.

4 Have you asked the right question or made the right statement?

5 Remember that you can only put the question or statement you submitted, and you may not make a speech, so make sure you have written the question or statement in such a way to make your point. This is particularly important in relation to questions if you are to obtain the information you are seeking.

6 Remember to indicate which is your first question/statement if you submit more than one for a particular meeting. There may be insufficient time to take the other(s) if several people have indicated that they wish to speak.

7 Have you checked the date of the next Council meeting?

8 Ensure that your question arrives in time and that you know exactly where to go and when. Where are Council meetings held?

Council meetings are generally held at 7:00pm on the second Monday of each month except for January when it is the third Monday; in the meeting room at the Community Centre in Station Road. DL17 9LA

**Appendix ‘2’**

**PUBLIC QUESTION TIME GUIDANCE**

Members of the public are welcome and encouraged to come along to the Parish Council meetings. In fact, by law members of the public must be admitted to all meetings of the full council and its committees.

**However, the law does not allow members of the public to take part in the debates and members of public may only speak during the public question time agenda item session.**

This council, like many other parish and town councils in England and Wales, gives members of the public an opportunity to speak at the relevant point of the meeting agenda.

Copies of meeting agendas are available from the Parish Clerk.

It is important for you to study the agenda so that when the opportunity occurs you can make the best use of your time.

You are very welcome to remain for the rest of the meeting, or leave as soon as you have spoken, this is entirely your choice, and the Parish Council welcomes attendance at council meetings.

**If you wish to raise a point which does not relate to an item on that evening’s agenda, you are free to do so.** However, the council’s discussion of the point might have to be delayed until a subsequent meeting as the council is unable to decide binding in law (this is particularly relevant to financial decisions), unless a specific item is included on the agenda.

Members of the council are always willing to discuss topics put forward by the public. Our agenda is prepared about a week before the next council meeting so you will need to inform the Parish Clerk or Chairman at least **ten days prior to the meeting.** Although this might seem a long time in advance the council is required by law to publicise its agenda at least three clear days before each meeting; these days do not include the day of issue, day of the meeting, and excludes weekends and bank holidays.

Here are some guidelines:

* The Chairman controls this session.
* The Chairman will request each speaker to identify themselves and give their address or representative body.
* Each speaker can speak for **up to 3 minutes** or as decided by the Chairman (if there is a keen interest in an issue, it is sensible for a spokesperson to be identified to speak rather than the same point being repeated).
* A person should raise his/her hand when wishing to ask a question and then stand when speaking (except, of course, if that person has a disability or is likely to suffer discomfort). Before speaking, it is helpful if that person gives his/her name.
* The question should be directed to the Chairman. It might be that the Chairman invites the Parish Clerk to respond to your questions.
* Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the Chairman shall direct in which order this will be. The rules on how meetings are run is set out in the Parish Council’s Standing Orders which can be downloaded from the Council’s website.