

HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mobile phones must be switched off during the meeting.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council meets and makes its decisions in public and is committed to community engagement and therefore invites members of the public, the press, the Police and County Councillors to attend meetings and to contribute within the public participation period. A Council meeting is not a public meeting: it is a meeting held in public. There is no requirement in law to provide an opportunity for the public to question or speak to the Council, but the Council welcomes the opportunity to offer it.
- 1.2 **Chairman.** If present the Mayor will always act as Chairman of the meeting.
- 1.3 **Best Practice.** This protocol has been developed based on best practice and recommendations from other Councils and the Local Government Association.
- 1.4 **Reason for Protocol.** Reflecting the fact that public discussion can occur on topics about which people care strongly (which is why they attend), this protocol exists to ensure that any public participation is conducted politely and in a structured and unemotional way.

2 THE PROTOCOL

- 2.1 **Duration.** Public participation will be for a period of time at the sole discretion of the Chairman of the meeting.
- 2.2 **Form of Questions.** Written questions received in advance of the meeting are encouraged but not essential: if provided in advance it is easier for an answer to be prepared. If questions are not provided in advance then members of the public should be aware the Chairman may be unable to answer and will defer the answer to a future date or until he can provide a written answer.
- 2.3 **Period for public participation.** The agenda will indicate when the public participation will take place. It is usually preceding the Council meeting so that Councillors may take into account any views expressed by the public when reaching Council decisions.
- 2.4 **Topics for Questions.** Public participation is permitted regarding items on any topic within the remit of the Town Council. Members of the public should be aware that if questions are raised which relate to topics not on the agenda then the matter is more likely to be deferred for a subsequent response as investigation may be required. If members of the public are unsure whether a question is within the remit of the Town Council then the Town Clerk will be able to answer this.
- 2.5 **Provision of responses.** If a question relates to an item on the agenda the Chairman may decide to address it immediately or (s)he may carry it forward for a response at a later date.

- 2.6 Discussion of topics by Councillors.** 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, except where a response has a deadline prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Council. The Council will therefore not enter into any discussion on a question raised if it is unable to answer a question directly.
- 2.7 Duration of each question.** A maximum of 3 minutes is permitted for a member of the public to ask a question. If members of the public wish for a more detailed dialogue than the 3 minutes allows on a question then they should contact the Chairman or any other Councillor for an individual discussion: the Town Council meeting is not the correct forum for conducting debates between Councillors and members of the public. Supplementary comments or questions are solely at the discretion of the Chairman.
- 2.8 Other Ways to ask Questions.** Members of the public should be aware that rather than bringing questions to the entire Council, questions may be addressed via the Clerk (01434 609575 or clerk@hexhamtowncouncil.gov.uk) or via any Town Councillor.
- 2.9 Role of Chairman.** All communication shall be through the Chairman. Councillors may not address questions raised by members of the public except through and with the permission of the Chairman. Members of the public may not address individual Councillors except through and with the permission of the Chairman. The Chairman's decision is final. Councillors and members of the public must respect the role of the Chairman and may be asked to leave if in the opinion of the Chairman they breach this protocol in any way that disrupts the orderly conduct of the meeting.
- 2.10 Time limit.** Members of the public are recommended to make the most of the 3 minutes by preparing notes carefully. If several people want to introduce the same question, it would be helpful where possible to get together in advance to pool ideas and choose the best person to speak for you all.
- 3. Disruption to Council Meetings.** Members of the public must respect the fact that this is a meeting to conduct Council business and interruptions during Council business are not permitted. If in the Chairman's opinion, 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 the person(s) will be asked to leave.

Adopted by the Council on 5 June 2017

Jane Kevan, Town Clerk clerk@hexhamtowncouncil.gov.uk