

4. PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC COMMUNITY MEETINGS

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of its community leadership role, the Council, together with other agencies, may arrange a public meeting in a ward or neighbourhood to gather information listen to the views of local people or resolve specific issues. Councillors, as local leaders, may also arrange a public meeting within their ward to discuss an issue of local importance or concern.
- 1.2 The purpose of this protocol is to provide guidance on the preparation and running of any public neighbourhood meeting arranged either by the Council, or by a councillor(s), where officers of the Council and representatives of other public agencies (e.g. the Police, County Council and housing associations) are expected to attend.

2. Involvement of Ward Councillors

- 2.1 Where a public meeting is to involve the participation of Council officers it should normally have the support of all the ward councillors who represent the ward in which it is to be held. All councillors representing wards affected, including county councillors, should also be invited to attend the meeting.

3. Preparation for a Public Meeting

- 3.1 Before a public meeting is called, the agenda and arrangements for the meeting should be agreed in consultation with the ward members and representatives of the principal agencies that are required to attend. Where councillors are seeking to arrange a public meeting, they should consult the appropriate officer first, especially if they expect officers to attend. Normally, a meeting will be convened for this purpose.
- 3.2 The Council will seek to meet the reasonable costs of holding public meetings, where officers of the Council are required to attend, subject to the arrangements for the meeting being agreed in advance with the Council.
- 3.3 It should be noted that following the publication of a Notice of Election, there are restrictions on the role and identification of councillors in Council publicity in the period leading up to the election (approximately six weeks). The general rule is that Members will neither be named nor quoted in corporate communications once the notice has been published.

- 3.4 The following issues should be considered at the initial preparation stage:

- i) Objectives/purpose

A public meeting should be based around clearly identified community issues. The purpose of the meeting is likely to inform the agenda, format, style and layout of the meeting. Bearing in mind the objectives identified, it could be decided to take an alternative approach, and attend as a speaker at another organisation's meeting.

ii) Which agencies should attend

Consideration should be given to the contribution an organisation can make to a meeting. Speakers should be briefed in advance about the nature, format, likely audience and objective of the meeting.

iii) Time, date and venue

Consideration should be given to attendees, thinking particularly about places that have convenient access for people with disabilities. A suitable venue should be chosen which can accommodate the numbers expected to attend. The Council Offices and the Princes Hall can be used as venues for public meetings.

iv) Publicity

Reasonable time should be given to publicise the event so that people can plan to attend, know where to go and what to expect. The Council's Corporate Communications Team may be able to publicise the event.

Councillors organising a public meeting might wish to publicise the event on social media and put adverts in local shops and newsletters showing the date, time, place and reason for the meeting, plus contact details.

v) Chairing arrangements

Public meetings involving the Council should be formally chaired.

vi) presentational aids

vii) housekeeping matters

4. Guidelines for the Meeting

4.1 Role of the Chair

The role of the Chair should be to:

- i) open the meeting
- ii) keep the meeting focused on the agenda – if necessary, to refer people back to the agenda
- iii) make sure that everyone who wants to speak gets a chance – not allowing one or two people to dominate proceedings
- iv) draws the meeting to a close at the appropriate time.

4.2 Creating the right atmosphere

The organiser(s) should aim to arrive at the venue in good time to check that any equipment and facilities requested are in place. This will include any catering arranged, as well as the equipment needed at the meeting. The location of fire

doors and alarms should also be checked. Those attending should be greeted as they arrive, avoiding any serious debates or discussions before the meeting starts.

4.3 Making a good start

The meeting should be started at the time arranged, with the appropriate introductions and a summary of the purpose of the meeting. If it is likely to be a while before the attendees can express their views (e.g. because there is a short, initial presentation), this should be made this clear, so that people have an expectation about the way the event is likely to proceed.

4.4 Getting the most from the meeting

- Make good use of questions raised at the meeting to probe, challenge and fully understand the views that people may have
- Arrange for someone to keep notes on the main points raised
- Keep an attendance sheet, with contact details, so that those attending can be provided with follow up information
- At the end of the meeting thank people for attending and explain clearly what the next steps will be

5. Conduct of Members and Officers During Public Meetings

- 5.1 At all public meetings, councillors and officers must act in accordance with the general principles contained in the Council's Protocol for Member/Officer Relations (set out in Part 5 of the Council's Constitution).
- 5.2 Under these provisions Members should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of a Council employee, or of employees collectively, at meetings held in public. Employees have no means of responding to criticisms like this in public. If Members feel that they have not been treated with proper respect or courtesy, or if they have any concern about the conduct or capability of a Council employee, they should raise it with the appropriate Director/Head of Service if they fail to resolve it through discussion with the employee's supervisor or manager.
- 5.3 In turn, there is an established convention that officers do not criticise Members in public meetings. Where an officer feels that he or she has a grievance against a Member it will normally be dealt with by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Member concerned and/or the leader of the appropriate political group.

6. After the Meeting

All agreed actions should be followed up after the event. Consideration should also be given to lessons learnt from the process, such as:

- did the meeting achieve what was expected?

- what aspects of the meeting were successful and what did not work?
- did things go as planned or were there any surprises?
- were there any problems that could have been avoided?