

KESGRAVE TOWN COUNCIL

Public Participation in Council Meetings Policy



Public participation

Council meets (full Council and Committees) and makes its decisions in public and is committed to community engagement. We warmly invite members of the public, the press, the police and district, or county councillors to attend our meetings and contribute during the public forum.

Rules set out in our Standing Orders control the manner of participation in order that Council meetings may proceed effectively and have sufficient time to cover all matters contained in the agenda. Public participation is an opportunity to ask questions but not to make statements. Interjections during proceedings are not permitted and if business is disrupted individuals may be asked to leave.

The following must be observed:

- The agenda will indicate when the public forum participation will take place, usually near to the beginning of a meeting and it will last for a maximum period of 15 minutes.
- Each member of the public will be allowed a maximum of 3 minutes to ask a question.
- Members of the public are encouraged to give prior notice to the Clerk or Chair that they wish to ask a question. This will allow Council to deliver as full a response as possible.
- The Chair will determine the order that questions from members of the public will be taken with first priority given to those who have given prior notice as above.
- Other criteria that may be taken into consideration by the Chair in determining the order that questions from the public will be taken are: the individual's previous record of asking questions at meetings, who arrived at the meeting first, and whether questions to be asked are the same or similar to other questions already asked, as well as the time remaining for this part of the meeting agenda specified above.
- At the sole discretion of the Chair, the time allowed for a member of the public to speak may be extended, the maximum period of the public participation session may also be extended, and contributions may be allowed at other points in the agenda. This will be only in exceptional circumstances and where it would help Councillor debate and decision-making by being able to ask questions of a member of public or an expert adviser.

In allowing the public forum, Council is aware that this forms only one means of consultation with the public. No decisions other than undertaking further research or writing to relevant bodies can be taken at the meeting where a matter is raised. In answer to questions about its services Council provides answers where possible at the meeting. If this is not possible a written/email response will be given to the questioner within 14 days of the meeting, the contents of which will be formally communicated at the next appropriate meeting.

Reports in the public forum

Council provides an opportunity for the police and district or county councillors to present reports. An opportunity will be given to ask questions, at the Chair of Council's discretion, subject to the relevant conditions above and within the overall time limit.

Recording of meetings

Meetings may be recorded by Council to enable those not present to see or hear the proceedings as they take place to do so later, and to enable the reporting of those proceedings.

Council supports the principle of openness and the rights of members of the public and the press to record and report on its Council and Committee meetings which are open to the public. 'Recording' is defined as filming, photographing, audio recording, written reporting (e.g. blogging) or oral commentary (but the latter is not permitted during the meeting itself).

Anybody wishing to film, photograph or audio record public meetings is asked to inform the Clerk 24 hours in advance to ensure that the necessary arrangements can be made. This will include arrangements to inform the relevant Councillors and any attending Officers, guest speakers and members of the public present and, where possible, to provide a separate area for any members of the public who do not wish to be included in the film, photographs or other recordings being made.

Anyone filming, photographing or audio recording public meetings is required to give due consideration at all times to ensure that there is no disruption to normal proceedings. In this regard, flash photography or additional lighting will not be permitted without the prior permission of the chair of the meeting.

Suspension or Termination of Recording

Where the chair of a relevant meeting considers that any filming, photographing, audio recording or social media reporting activity is causing a disruption to the meeting, the person causing the disruption will be requested to take the appropriate action. Should the disruption continue, which makes orderly business impossible, the chair will have the discretion to take whatever action they determine is appropriate in accordance with Council's Standing Orders (e.g. adjourn the meeting).

The termination or suspension of filming, photographing, audio recording and social media reporting will occur when:

- there is any public disturbance of the meeting;
- there is moving around whilst filming;
- the chair considers that a defamatory statement has been made;
- requests are received from members of the public to cease recording when they speak;
- people are asked to repeat statements for the purposes of recording;
- the meeting formally agrees to exclude the press and public from the meeting due to the exempt nature of the business being discussed; or
- it is considered that continued recording/filming/photographing could infringe the rights of any individual (e.g. an individual in the public section has made a specific request to the Chair of the meeting that they do not wish to be filmed, photographed or audio recorded).

In line with national legislation, recording must only relate to the public meeting itself and must not extend to anybody seated in the public section who does not form part of the proceedings. Recording a member of the public without their prior express permission is not permitted.

Use of recordings by third parties

Council welcomes responsible, balanced reporting of its meetings in order to promote greater transparency and awareness of its decision-making. In so doing, Council requests that any recording provides a balanced representation of the proceedings and that it is not edited in such a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings or which reflects only a single or particular point expressed at the meeting.

Any published recording should be accompanied by a statement of when and where the recording was made, the context of the discussion that took place, and a clear identification of the main speakers and their role or title. Anyone broadcasting a recording should be mindful of the potential for defamation and breaching privacy and data protection regulations.

Please also refer to Council's current Standing Orders available on the website.

Last reviewed: 02 June 2025

Next review due: 02 June 2028