

“over to you”

**A guide on
how to speak
at council
meetings**



How do I speak to Councillors at Council meetings?

There are three schemes:

- 1. Public Participation**
- 2. Public Speaking on Planning Applications**
- 3. Public Discussion at Scrutiny.**
- 4. Presenting a Petition**

The schemes encourage you, as a member of the public, to take an interest in the Council's affairs.

You may speak about any matter which relates to the Council or to North Somerset.

You may not speak on any matter that involves confidential information or which would be defamatory or abusive of an individual.



1. Public Participation

(excludes planning applications)

Which meetings am I allowed to address?

You may ask to speak at meetings of the Council, the Planning and Regulatory Committee, Area Committees and most Sub-Committees. A calendar of meetings is available from Democratic Services at the Town Hall.

What can I speak about?

You can speak on any matter (except a planning application for which there is a separate scheme) relating to the Council or the remit of the Committee or Sub-Committee, whether or not the item is on the agenda. Any comments or questions must not result in the disclosure of exempt or confidential information.

How do I register my wish to speak at a meeting?

You must write or send a fax or e-mail to the Solicitor to the Council indicating your request to speak and detailing the subject matter. You must include your name and address and it must be received by 12 noon on the day before the meeting. You do not normally have to provide a transcript in advance although exceptionally the Chairman may ask for one for legal reasons.

You must be a resident, a business ratepayer or an elector of North Somerset and you should indicate which of these you are when you apply.

For how long can I speak?

Generally, you can speak for up to five minutes but the Chairman may reduce this if there are more than six people that want to speak.

Alternatively the Chairman may agree to extend the Public Participation Time.

At what point in the meeting will I be able to speak to the Councillors?

Public Participation Time is generally the first item on the agenda.

What will happen after I have spoken to the Councillors?

You may be asked questions to clarify what you have said. If the item is on the agenda, the Councillors will consider your comments when discussing the report. If not, the Chairman will respond as appropriate and may indicate some other course of action.

2. Public Speaking on Planning Applications

How may I speak to Councillors on planning applications?

You may speak to Councillors at any meeting of the Planning and Regulatory Committee and Area Committees when they are considering a particular planning application. There are special rules for planning matters to ensure fairness to both applicants and objectors.

Who can speak?

Normally, only two speakers are allowed on any one planning application. If you are the applicant and the application has attracted supporters, you may speak or defer to a supporter. If you are one of a number of objectors, a spokesperson will have

to be agreed. If agreement cannot be made, the Chairman of the Committee will select the person to speak.

How do I register my wish to speak at a meeting?

If you wish to speak you must write or e-mail to the Solicitor to the Council giving details of the planning application and whether you wish to speak for or against the application. You must include your name and address and it must be received by 12.00 noon on the day before the meeting.

If I am an objector, do I have to speak at the Committee meeting?

No. Your objections are reported to the Committee anyway and it is up to you whether or not you wish to attend the meeting.

You should note, however, that the Committee does not always accept the officer's recommendations.

If I am the applicant or agent do I have to speak at the Committee meeting?

No. If the officer's recommendation to the Committee is to approve the proposal you may decide that there is little to add to the report. However, the Committee does not always accept the officer's recommendations.

What order will the items be in the Committee meeting?

Public speaking on planning applications will normally be at the start of the meeting.

The Committee will hear those wishing to speak in the following order unless the Chairman considers it preferable in conducting the business of the Committee to hear speakers in a different order: the speaker against the application first and the applicant or their supporter second.

For how long will I be able to speak?

Public Speaking on Planning Applications is limited to three minutes per applicant and/or supporters and three minutes for the objectors. Each speaker will only be permitted to address the Committee once and will not be able to speak further while Councillors debate the item.

No visual aids/presentations or display boards are permitted.

What are the relevant issues?

The relevant issues will vary with the nature of the application and the site, but may include: Structure Plan and Local Plan, Government circulars and Guidance Notes, case law and previous decisions, highway safety and traffic, noise, disturbance, design appearance and layout, conservation (buildings, trees etc.) and residential amenities.

What issues are irrelevant in reaching planning decisions?

Again these vary from case to case, but the following are usually irrelevant: matters covered by other laws (e.g. alcohol licence), private property rights (e.g. boundary or access disputes), the developer's morals or motives, loss of view over other people's land, and effect on the value of property.

How long will Public Speaking on Planning Applications last and what happens next?

Normally for up to 30 minutes, but where there is a large number of applications with people wishing to speak, the Chairman might reduce the time allowed for each speaker, or exceptionally, allow more time in total.

Following this, the Committee will determine the applications in the order listed on the agenda.

What happens if the applicant decides to amend the application at the meeting?

Applicants who make a suggestion to the Committee that they will modify their submitted proposal to meet the planning requirements will normally be invited to submit a new application. This will enable the revised proposal to be properly assessed, as well as allow interested people to make their views known. The Committee's decision will be made on the basis of the application as it stands at the meeting.

3. Public Discussion (Policy and Scrutiny Panels)

What do these Panels do?

The seven Policy and Scrutiny Panels investigate and review the Council's decisions and report to the Full Council, the Executive, and the other Committees.

How may I address Policy and Scrutiny Panel meetings?

At the discretion of the Chairman, you may address meetings of these Panels. You must speak on matters which affect the District and for which the Panel has the position of reviewing.

Councillors on the Policy and Scrutiny Panel may ask you questions and a dialogue between you can be undertaken.

You must send your request to speak, in writing, by fax or e-mail, to the Solicitor to the Council by 12 noon on the day before the meeting and you must detail the subject matter to be discussed.

4. Presenting a Petition

(presented at Full Council meetings)

A petition is a statement, signed by a group of people about a particular matter affecting them. It may be presented by someone who lives in North Somerset or is a business ratepayer.

It must be relevant to the Council's powers and duties and affect at least some of the residents of the District.

It may not relate to certain applications or legal action.

The petition, and the request to present it, must be received in writing or by fax or e-mail by the Solicitor to the Council by 12 noon at least seven working days before the meeting (excludes Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays).

When presenting a petition you may speak about it for up to three minutes.

Normally the petition will be referred to the Executive, the appropriate Executive Councillor, a committee or sub-committee without debate.

Further information and requests to speak

Telephone Democratic Services on: **01934 634 900**

Who will be happy to assist further.

Corporate Services Unit

North Somerset Council

Town Hall

Weston-super-Mare

BS23 1UJ

Tel: **01934 888 888**

email: **comments@n-somerset.gov.uk**



Corporate Services Unit
PO Box 138, Town Hall
Weston-super-Mare
Somerset BS23 1DZ

Tel: 01934 888 888

email: comments@n-somerset.gov.uk