

A Guide to Committee Meetings at Warrington Borough Council

All meetings of Warrington Borough Council Committees are usually open to the press and public and take place at the Town Hall, Warrington. This guidance is designed to help you understand the Council's meetings.

Who's who at the meeting? - Name plates are displayed at the meeting outlining the names of Councillors and Officers. The Chairman generally sits at the centre of the table at one end of the room. It is the Chairman's job to control the meeting and to ensure that proceedings are orderly. The Members of the Committee are elected Councillors, appointed to the Committee by Council at the start of the municipal year in May.

Council Officers will have provided professional advice to the Councillors in preparing the reports and will be present at the meeting to provide any further information. They are also responsible for implementing the decisions made by the Committee. The Democratic Services Officer attends to give advice on procedure as well as recording the decisions made (i.e. taking the minutes). In some instances a Legal Officer will also attend to provide legal advice and guidance.

What's being discussed? - The Agenda - Items to be discussed are listed on the agenda and are available to read on the Council's website one week in advance of the meeting. Most agenda items consist of a report, followed by recommendations. Some items include confidential information and therefore no details are included in the agenda.

Confidential Business - Confidential business (referred to as 'part 2' on the agenda) includes matters such as financial information about private sector firms which could be commercially sensitive, and certain legal and personnel matters etc. Before such items are discussed, the meeting will pass a special resolution to exclude the press and public and you will have to leave the room. Such items are usually placed at the end of the agenda.

How is the meeting run? - Council Procedure Rules - The conduct of the meeting is governed by a set of procedures which have been agreed by the Council and are set out in the Council's constitution.

Declarations of Interest - At the start of the meeting Members have to say publicly if they have an interest in any of the items. This is called 'declaring an interest' and, when the relevant item is reached, the Member normally leaves the room whilst it is being discussed, unless the interest is relatively minor and of a nature deemed not to effect how they will make their decision.

Resolutions - To reach a decision the Councillors must pass a resolution which means that the majority of Members who vote agree with what is proposed. If there is a majority vote against the recommendations made, the Members will usually indicate what action they would like the Officer to take instead.

Sometimes a Member may wish to change part of a recommendation and so he/she will propose an amendment. Amendments have to be seconded by another Member before they can be put to the vote.

Voting - Voting sometimes seems a bit confusing because amendments have to be voted on first. If an amendment is passed the amended motion then becomes the 'substantive' motion and must be voted on again. If it is supported it becomes the resolution. The Chairman usually explains what is happening so that Members and visitors know exactly what is being voted on.

Keeping Accurate Records - Minutes - The minutes of the meetings are a record of what took place and are written by the Democratic Services Officers. Minutes are available on the Council website once they have been agreed at the next meeting of the committee.

How do I make my views known? - Public Participation allows you the opportunity to make a statement or ask questions at the appropriate time at most Council meetings. The procedures for each committee differ and the Chair has discretion as to what he/she will allow to be put forward. There is public seating provided at Council meetings. Details are provided below on how you can interact at the meetings.

Examples of the procedures followed at Committees

Development Management Committee - Members of the public can speak in support of or object to an item, as can Parish and Borough Council representatives. A three minute period is allowed for public speaking for each party in total, i.e. three minutes for objectors, three minutes for supporters and a separate three minutes each for both the Parish and Borough Councillors.

Licensing Sub-Committees - As part of the application process members of the public, Parish Councils and Ward Councillors are asked to forward comments in writing prior to the committee meeting. Only those having provided written comments are allowed to speak in support or against an application. Public speaking is allowed at the Chairman's discretion and the time allowed for presentations is again at the Chairman's discretion.

Traffic Committee - Members of the public can speak in support of or object to an item, as can Parish and Borough Council representatives. A three minute period is allowed for public speaking for each party in total, i.e. three minutes for objectors, three minutes for supporters and a separate three minutes each for both the Parish and Borough Councillors.

Council - Members of the public may ask a question at an ordinary meeting of the Council. Notice of this must be given in writing no later than noon, five clear working days before the date of the meeting at which the question will be put. There is no opportunity for discussion on the matter but a supplementary question may be asked if related. No more than three questions shall be put at any one meeting and a time limit of five minutes shall apply per question to cover the asking of the question, the response and any supplementary question and response..

Executive Board - Public speaking at these meetings is not normally allowed. However, the Chairman will allow members of the public to speak on certain occasions such as during consideration of an item that has been 'called-in' through the Overview and Scrutiny process.

As procedures differ between Committees please contact Democratic Services on
01925 443212 for further information.