

Public Participation at Committee Meetings

Dorset Council welcomes public attendance and involvement at all of its formal committee meetings. You can participate in a meeting by attending and listening to councillors debate and make decisions; by asking a question, making a statement or presenting a petition relating to the business of the committee.

Decisions made by Dorset Council will affect people who live and work in Dorset and the council wishes to ensure that these decisions are fair and democratic.

Please read the information below that sets out the guidelines for public participation. There is separate [Guidance to Speaking at Planning Committee](#) should you wish to make representations to one of the area planning committees. There is also separate guidance for anyone wishing to attend a licensing sub-committee, for details please view the [Licensing sub-committee procedure and guidance](#).


How does public speaking work?

Any member of the public living or working in the Dorset Council area, or any appointed representative of any organisation operating within the council's area may ask a question, make a statement or present a petition.

Dorset Council also welcomes the attendance of town and parish council representatives at committee and Full Council meetings and the Chairman will normally invite the clerk or parish councillor to speak first at a meeting.

Please note that you do not need to tell the council in advance if you just wish to attend the committee meeting to listen to debate.

How will I know what is on the agenda for a meeting?

Agendas are normally published at least one week in advance of the meeting and are available to view at www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. Committee agendas are also available to view by downloading a free app called **modern.gov**  onto your laptop or tablet.

How do I make a request to speak?

You need to let the council know if you wish to speak at a committee meeting by contacting the Democratic Services Team at least **3 working days** before the meeting. Requests can be emailed to democraticservicesteamb@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk. Or you can phone the council (01305 25100) and ask to speak to democratic services.

When registering your request to speak please provide the following information:

- Your name, address and contact details;
- The name of the councillor to whom the question is directed;
- The full text of the question or statement in plain English.

How long may I speak?

You are able to speak for up to 3 minutes when asking a question or making a statement. However the Chairman of the committee will use their discretion if it is appropriate to extend this time.

What will happen at the meeting itself?

The Chairman will invite you to speak at the appropriate point in the meeting, usually at the beginning of the meeting. Town and parish councils will normally be invited to speak first followed by members of the public; councillors will listen to all of the questions and statements made. The most appropriate councillor will respond to the question at the meeting or if the information is not available a written response will be provided after the meeting.

Is there a limit on the number of people allowed to speak?

There is no limit on the number of people able to speak within the 15 minutes set aside for public questions and statements. Occasionally this time may be extended by the Chairman if it is appropriate to do so. No person or organisation may ask/make more than 2 questions or statements at any one meeting.

Who can submit a Petition?

Anyone who lives works or studies in the council's area may organise or sign a petition. This includes anyone under the age of 18. Full details of the Petition Scheme is set out in the [Dorset Council's Constitution](#) under the procedure rules. If you are thinking about organising a petition please contact the Democratic Services Team who can provide you with help and advice.

How can I submit a Petition?

A petition must include a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition, state what lawful action the petitioners wish the council to take, be signed by at least 20 people supporting the petition, include the name, address and signature of any person supporting the petition and contact details of the petition organiser.

Petitions can be submitted in paper format or through an e-petition portal. Petitions can also be presented to the meeting of Full Council if it meets the threshold. Where the threshold is met the petition organiser should contact democratic services at least **10 working days** before the Full Council meeting. The council's response will depend on the number of people who have signed the petition and the table below sets out that threshold

Number of signatories	Responses
20 – 49	Response from relevant director or service head
50 – 4,999	Response from relevant Executive member
5000+	Referred for debate at a meeting of full Council

What happens next?

If the petition has enough signatures to trigger a debate at Full Council then the petition organiser will be informed when and where the meeting will take place. The council will try to consider the petition at its next meeting, although sometimes this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting.

The petition organiser or a person representing the petition organiser will have 3 minutes to present the petition at the Full Council meeting. The petition will be debated by councillors unless the petition is referred to another committee for consideration, in which case it will not be debated. Councillors may ask questions of the petition organiser and the petition organiser, or their representative, will have 3 minutes at the end of the debate to respond before the councillors take a vote on the matter.

Please refer to the council's Petition Scheme in the [Constitution](#) for further details or contact a member of the Democratic Services Team for help and advice.