



MABLETHORPE & SUTTON TOWN COUNCIL

A Brief Guide to Town Council Meetings

By law, a Town Council is required to abide by certain legal regulations. This meeting guide offers guidance to members of the public and new Councillors to enable better understanding of how Council meetings work.

How is the Council made up?

The Members of the Town Council are elected (usually at ordinary elections, held every 4 years) by the electorate of the area to represent and serve as a corporate body and to decide upon and provide local services.

Mablethorpe & Sutton Town Council is made up of 19 elected Members across seven 'wards' within the parish. All full Town Council meetings are presided over by the Chairman (Mayor) with committees, sub committees or working groups presided over by a duly appointed elected Member.

How are meetings called and conducted?

By law, the date time and place of full Town Council and committee meetings must be posted in a public place at least three clear days prior to the meeting date. Mablethorpe & Sutton Town Council displays agenda documentation at least three days prior to a meeting on the public notice boards in Mablethorpe, Trusthorpe and Sutton on Sea and also uploads and displays the same on its website. Meetings are usually held on Monday evenings in the Community Room, Mablethorpe Library and CAP. Stanley Avenue, Mablethorpe, LN12 1DP at 7.00p.m.

Similarly there is a duty for agenda documentation to be delivered to Councillors giving the same three clear days' notice. Only those relevant matters or items of business contained within an agenda can be discussed, considered or transacted at a meeting.

Town Council meetings are open for members of the public to attend; however, these meetings **are not** public meetings. In short, meetings are held to enable the Council to conduct its business, in an atmosphere conducive to working and the public are permitted to attend to watch and listen but not interfere with proceedings.

Are residents allowed to speak or contribute?

It is not a necessity or a legal requirement to allow members of the public to speak at any Town Council meeting. It is good practice for a Town Council to ensure provision to allow members of the public to raise issues within the parish at the beginning. It is not always practical or reasonable for the Town Council to give immediate responses to any questions posed.

Mablethorpe & Sutton Town Council provides the opportunity for members of the public to speak at the beginning of each full Town Council meeting. Members of the public will be allowed to speak at this time, but they must understand they must not take part at any other time.

What are Standing Orders & Financial Regulations?

Standing Orders are a set of instructions, adopted by the Council to regulate the way the corporate body handles its affairs and business detailing how conducted proceedings should be.

From time to time, the Council may, by resolution, suspend some (but not all) Standing Orders; this enables the council to transact matters without the restriction of agreed practice (i.e. this could allow members of the public to address the Council during a debate, where contributions or relevant information may assist the Council in making decisions).

Financial Regulations are a set of instructions, adopted by the Council to regulate the way the corporate body handles its financial transactions, contracts and internal control.

These legislative regulations cannot be suspended, however, by resolution of the Council, some Financial Regulations can be tailored to meet Council requirements.

Poor standards of behaviour in Council meetings.

Elected Members (Councillors) are bound by the Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors and adopted Standing Orders. Councillors must conduct themselves in a proper manner and adhere to the seven principles in public life (the Nolan Principles) being:

- **Selflessness:** Councillors should act in the public interest.
- **Integrity:** Councillors should not put themselves under any obligations to others, allow them to influence them or seek benefit for themselves, family, friends or close associates.
- **Objectivity:** Councillors should act impartially.
- **Accountability:** Councillors should be prepared to submit to public scrutiny.
- **Openness:** Councillors should be open and transparent in their actions and decisions unless there are clear and lawful reasons for non-disclosure.
- **Honesty:** Councillors should always be truthful.
- **Leadership:** Councillors should promote, support and exhibit high standards of conduct and be willing to challenge poor behaviour.

Above all, Councillors should **respect each other's viewpoints**, and challenge proposals and not individuals. Unruly behaviour from either Councillors or members of the public will not be tolerated; those demonstrating such behaviour will be asked to refrain, asked to leave the meeting or may be removed. Where a meeting becomes unmanageable due to interruption, disturbance or disregard for the general authority of the position of the Chairman (Mayor), the Council can and will resolve to temporarily close the meeting or reconvene at a later date.

How does a member of the public to speak or raise issues at Council meeting?

Where possible, please inform the Town Clerk in advance that you wish to speak or raise an issue at a forthcoming Council meeting. This may enable the Clerk to research an issue and enable or assist with your query.

Members of the public will be given the opportunity to speak within the public forum at the beginning of all full Town Council meetings. This may be in relation to a specific agenda item or another matter.

- 1) Try to speak to the Clerk or Chairman prior to the commencement of the meeting to advise that you wish to speak or raise an issue in the public forum or in relation to a specific agenda item. If you are nervous, the Clerk or Chairman can raise a matter on your behalf.
- 2) During the public forum, Councillors should not interrupt or debate issues with members of the public, however, they may interject where it would be counter-productive not to so. Elected Members may respond, but debate or long discussions will not take place and no decisions can be made. The Town Clerk will either note or respond to most public comments and advise should if:
 - a) the Town Council can legally consider or make any future decision on the matter;
 - b) the matter can be referred to another authority, or;
 - c) the matter will need a future Council decision - in this case, the matter will be placed on a future (but not necessarily the next) agenda.

No legal decisions or expenditure can be made on any item raised during a meeting by members of public or Councillors as this would not be legal (i.e. not notified on an agenda in advance).

Notes for Councillor consideration:

If an item raised in the public forum is of 'personal or prejudicial' interest to yourself, you should be mindful to consider and declare that interest.

The 'public forum' gives the opportunity for members of the public to interact with the Town Council and debating or disagreeing with points at this time is counter-productive and must not be used to garner or gain individual or political support.