

Meetings guidance for Members

This note is to clarify for Members some of the key points that arise from public participation, public representations, and processes at public Authority and committee meetings.

Procedural matters

The following related points are important to set out for Members.

- Written representations on items for meetings should always be sent to the relevant Head of Service. It is important that Members advise any who contact them of this procedure.
- Any written representations received prior to agenda papers being finalised are always summarised by the report author for inclusion in the report.
- Any written representations received after papers are published must be addressed to the relevant Head of Service and be received at Aldern House by 17.00 on the Wednesday preceding the Friday meeting, unless they are from formal consultees in which case they will be accepted provided they are received prior to the commencement of the meeting. The representations received by the specified times will be summarised by the officer at the meeting.
- Any representations not received in time or by the proper route cannot be reported at meetings by officers, and in any case cannot be reported or circulated by Members.
- It is not Authority practice for written representations, nor documents submitted in support of representations, to be circulated to Members. Copies of written representations and documents sent to Aldern House cannot be distributed to Members.
- Lobbying letters or e-mails received by Members must not be distributed to other Members. Members should mention the receipt, but not the contents, of any lobbying material at the meeting.
- The officers have the responsibility to ensure that their summaries record the key relevant points being made in the representations.

Matters of communication with the public, officers and Members at meetings

Members need to ensure that we are able to adhere to the following ground-rules for conducting business in public at meetings. Authority and Committee meetings are one of the most public faces of the National Park Authority and it is important to protect public confidence in the process and the reputation of the Authority.

- It is important that during public participation we question the speakers in a neutral manner, i.e. not showing either aggression or undue support for the person. Questions need to be relevant to the item before the meeting, precise and clear, and not preceded or followed by comment. We should always show respect for the speakers, whether or not we accept what has been said.

- The same basic guidance applies when questioning officers. For their part, officers need to provide guidance and answers to Members that is given in a clear and professional manner.
- Decisions must always be made on material considerations. During discussions on items, comments need to be directly relevant and focused, endeavoring wherever possible to avoid repetition of what other Members have said. While relevant local knowledge may assist, comments should avoid personal anecdotal statements.
- It is important to conduct the business with relevant seriousness. Decisions should not be seen to be taken lightly. We need to avoid treating matters light-heartedly, and avoid showing disinterest or disengagement including through non-attentive conversations between Members. We should conduct business through the Chair.
- As well as showing respect for the public and officers, we also need to show respect for other Members, including accepting that there can be a wide range of diverse views on one item.
- It is important to avoid behaviour which may appear to give the impression that Members are not aware of formal meeting procedures.
- If Members are voting on a motion or an amendment put forward by a Member which is contrary to an officer recommendation, it is essential before the vote is taken that the Member moving the motion clearly sets out the terms of the motion if necessary by taking officer advice. The reasons must be clear and convincing. Officers must be given the opportunity to explain the consequences of the decision before it is taken.

Chairs would prefer not to have to remind Members of the above points during meetings but will do so if necessary.

Please be aware that any inappropriate procedures at meetings could give rise to complaints to the Ombudsman, a claim for costs in an appeal or to Judicial Review and inappropriate behaviour could give rise to a formal complaint about a Member by an aggrieved person which would have to be investigated.

Chairing meetings

Guidance has been produced for the Chairs on procedures at meetings. All Members have a copy of this.