

Silloth-on-Solway Town Council

Public Participation Policy

1. Introduction and Purpose

In accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press are entitled to attend all meetings of the Council and its committees. There is no statutory right for the public to speak; however, Silloth-on-Solway Town Council provides a designated period during its meetings for members of the public to make representations through a formal adjournment of the meeting, as permitted by our Standing Orders. This policy ensures participation is conducted in an orderly manner.

2. Frequency and Timing

- Public participation is a regular part of all Town Council meetings.
- The Chair will formally adjourn the meeting to allow the public session to commence.
- The session shall not exceed 15 minutes unless directed by the Chair.
- The meeting will be reconvened immediately following the public session to resume official business.

3. Requirements for Speaking

- **Prior Notice:** Items for discussion must be submitted to the Town Clerk in writing prior to the meeting. The Clerk will confirm receipt and notify the resident if the item has been added to the public session list.
- **Limitations:** A maximum of three items will be discussed per meeting.
- **Time Limits:** Each speaker is permitted a maximum of 3 minutes.
- **Spokesperson:** If multiple people wish to speak on the same topic, the Chair may request they nominate a single spokesperson to avoid duplication.
- **Refusal:** The Clerk/Chair may only refuse a request to speak if the item does not relate to Council business or if the speaker has already been designated as 'Vexatious' under the Council's specific policy.

4. Conduct and Protocol

- **Addressing the Chair:** All comments and questions must be directed to the Chair.
- **Order of Speaking:** Only one person may speak at a time at the Chair's direction.
- **Physical Protocol:** Speakers should raise their hand to speak and stand while speaking unless disability or discomfort prevents this.
- **Mutual Respect:** All participants—both the public and councillors—must treat others with courtesy and respect.
- **Chair's Authority:** The Chair is responsible for keeping control of the session. The Chair has the authority to stop a speaker or refuse a contribution if the content is deemed defamatory, frivolous, offensive, or involves improper language or behaviour. If the speaker ignores the requests of the Chair, the Chair will exercise their discretion to end the public participation session immediately and formally reconvene the Full Council meeting.

- **Responses:** A question shall not require an immediate response nor start a debate. The Chair may direct that a written or oral response be provided later.

5. Managing Disorderly Conduct

If a member of the public obstructs the transaction of business or behaves offensively, the Chair will follow this sequence:

1. **Initial Warning:** The Chair will request the person moderate or improve their conduct.
2. **Termination of Public Session:** If the disruption persists, the Chair will exercise their discretion to end the public participation session immediately and formally reconvene the Full Council meeting.
3. **Formal Resolution (Standing Order 2):** Once the meeting has resumed, if the person continues to disrupt proceedings:
 - **Motion:** Any councillor or the Chair may move that the person "be no longer heard" or "be excluded from the meeting."
 - **Voting:** This motion, if seconded, shall be put to the vote immediately without discussion.
4. **Suspension of Meeting:** If the formal resolution is ignored, the Chair may take further reasonable steps to restore order, which may include temporarily suspending or closing the meeting.

6. Legal and Procedural Constraints

- **Decision Making:** The Council cannot make formal resolutions or decisions during the Public Participation session as the meeting is adjourned. Matters can be put forward for the agenda of a future meeting.
- **Confidentiality:** The public may be excluded from all or part of a meeting by resolution if their presence is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business.
- **Recording of Meetings:** In accordance with the *Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014*, members of the public may film, photograph, or audio-record proceedings while the meeting is open to the public.
- **Reporting Restrictions:** Oral reporting or oral commentary during a meeting as it takes place is not permitted.

7. Minutes

- The minutes will accurately record if a public participation session took place.
- A brief record of the topics raised will be included in the minutes.
- The minutes will reflect the general nature of the representation but will not be a verbatim transcript.

8. Contact Information

To request to speak at a meeting, please contact the Town Clerk, 5 Burnswark Terrace, Solway Street, Silloth, Cumbria, CA7 4EF Tel: 0777 5686857 Email: townclerk@silloth-on-solway-tc.gov.uk