



NORTH TAWTON TOWN COUNCIL

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This is a document that sets out North Tawton Town Councils approved and agreed practices. Any deviation must be by resolution of the full Council.

DOCUMENT NAME:	Protocol for Public Participation in Town Council Meetings
Approved and Ratified date:	05.08.2025
Minutes Reference:	098:25/26(II)
Review date:	August 2027
Version no:	V2

Version	Point(s)	Description of Change	Date

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Protocol for Public Participation in Town Council Meetings

Purpose: Protocol for participation in the public question session by members of the public during North Tawton Town Council (NTTC) meetings (meetings include ordinary meetings, extraordinary meetings or committee meetings).

In preparing this Protocol the Town Council has referred to guidance published by the National Association of Local councils (NALC). This protocol should be read in conjunction with NTTC Standing Orders and the NTTC Code of Conduct.

All members of the public and press are welcome to attend meetings of North Tawton Town Council and have a legal right to do so under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. They also have the right to record meetings in accordance with the Town Council Recording of Meetings Policy. The NTTC meeting is not a public meeting, and residents are asked to respect the fact that this is a meeting to conduct Council business. Interruptions during Council business are not permitted.

There is no statutory right for members of the public to speak at these meetings although NTTC will hold a Public Period during each meeting where residents are invited to contribute. Members of the public are welcome to stay for the Council meeting as observers after the public session but will not be able to join in any discussion for the rest of the meeting.

From time-to-time confidential items may be discussed, in which case the press and members of the public will be excluded by resolution in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. These items will appear on the Agenda as 'Part II'

The agenda is the official order of business for NNTC meetings. By law, the Town Council cannot act on items or issues that are not listed in the agenda. The Public Period will be early in the agenda so that Town Councillors may consider any views expressed when reaching their decisions.

The time allocated for the public participation session will be a maximum period of fifteen minutes, however this can be extended at the discretion of the Chair.

Public participation is an opportunity for members of the public to (a) make representations, (b) answer questions or (c) give evidence relating to the business to be transacted.

A maximum of two minutes is permitted for a member of the public to speak. Supplementary comments or questions are solely at the discretion of the Chair. The Chair has the right and discretion to control questions to avoid disruption, repetition and to make best use of the meeting time.

The Chair has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted and stop the speaker from continuing to speak. If the speaker ignores the requests of the Chair, they will be asked to leave the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 2.

Where there is an interest group of objectors or supporters, a spokesperson should be appointed to speak on behalf of the group. This will avoid duplication and make the best use of the time set aside for public participation.

If a resident is unable to attend a meeting in person, at the Chair's discretion questions may be submitted either in writing or by e-mail for the respective meeting and should be submitted to the Town Clerk three working days prior to the respective meeting. Questions or comments submitted in this way will be treated the same as if the person was there in person and the Clerk will state the

name of the person before reading the question. Anonymous questions or correspondence will not be accepted.

How to ask questions:

- A person should raise their hand when requesting to speak.
- When recognised by the Chair, they should state their name and say which agenda item the question relates to, if appropriate.
- The speaker should confirm they are a resident of North Tawton.
- A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct their comments to the Chair of the meeting.
- Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the Chair of the meeting shall direct the order of speaking.
- Questions will be answered by the Chair, Clerk or a Councillor in a relevant Working Group, as appropriate.

Neither Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made under public participation. A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require a response at the meeting and there should be no debate or discussion between the Council and the public. The Chair of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given. Members of the public are therefore requested to leave their contact details with the Clerk if they wish to receive a written reply.

- Councillors with a prejudicial interest in an agenda item will be allowed to speak during this agenda item (and then leave the room when the item is considered).
- Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes.
- If the issue is on the agenda, then it will be discussed under the appropriate item. Members of the public will not be allowed to speak during the debate by the Council. The Chair may decide to suspend Standing Orders where Councillors express a wish to seek additional clarification from members of the public.
- A brief record of topics raised at public participation will be included in the minutes of that meeting.
- All persons present will act respectfully towards every other person present and will not act in a manner that demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates him or her. All statements, questions and responses, challenges to statements, complaints or criticisms must be relevant and made politely.
- All statements, questions and responses must be related to the facts of the matter and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to the personal views of any person.

Please note that offensive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. If a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of any meeting the Council reserves the right to curtail the contribution of that person and exclude a disorderly person. Members of the public should respect the rulings of the Chair. The Chair has an inherent right to exclude a disorderly person. Members of the public have a legal right to be present so excluding one or more of them will be a last resort. Alternatively, if there is serious disorder the Chair may decide to adjourn the meeting for a short time to allow order to be restored.

Summary Statement

There is no legal right for members of the public to speak at Council meetings. The Town Council
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welcomes the participation of residents during the Public Period subject to:

- Contributions should be limited to items on the Agenda for the meeting.
- The Town Council cannot respond to any issues raised that are not on the agenda
- The time limit for each person wishing to speak is 2 minutes
- The Chair of the meeting has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and to ask the person to stop speaking.
- All persons present will act respectfully towards every other person present and will not act in a manner that demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates them.
- All statements, questions, responses, complaints or criticisms must be made politely.
- All statements, questions and responses must be related to the facts of the matter and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to the personal views of any person.
- Persons who disrupt a Council meeting or refuse to comply with the Chair's requests, will be asked to leave the meeting.

* The Chair, at the beginning of every meeting, will remind the public of the protocol and the above statement, which is displayed in the Town Council Office and available on the Town Council's website. This statement will also be used to cover all occasions where the public interact with the Council, its employers and or councillors when in the Town Council Office, when in a community setting and at the Annual Town Meeting. It does not cover an interaction between a member of the public and a Councillor or Town Council employees when not in their role of office.

Adopted: 5th August 2025

Minute Ref: 098:25/26 (I)

Review Date: August 2026