

**Public Participation at
Committee Meetings**



Revised January 2016

Have you something to say about the way your local services are run, or perhaps an idea or information you would like to pass on to your elected councillors?

Maybe you want to tell the councillors your views about an issue which they are going to discuss at a committee meeting? Either way, you are welcome to come along to meetings to tell us what you think. The thoughts and views of local residents and business people are very valuable in helping the council to reach informed decisions. So why not get involved?

This leaflet answers the questions which are asked most often by people who want to speak at meetings.

To help you make the most effective use of this opportunity, please take a few moments to read this leaflet if you are thinking of coming along.

Questions and Answers

Q Who can speak?

A The principal purpose of the council is to ensure the provision, directly or indirectly, of services for the residents and businesses of the district. The right to speak extends to residents, those employed in the district, businesses and other organisations based within the district and their representatives.

Q At which meetings may I speak?

A You can speak at meetings of the Planning Committee, Governance and Audit Committee, Licensing and Regulatory Committee, Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and Prosperous Communities Committee.

The Council also operates schemes whereby you can participate and ask questions at Council meetings, and speak on planning applications at Planning Committee meetings. These are covered by different arrangements and leaflets are also available on these schemes.

Q Can I speak at any time during the meeting?

A There is a 15 minute public participation period set aside at the start of these meetings. This is the opportunity to talk about either general issues under the particular committee's area of responsibility or about things which are on the agenda to be discussed in public session.

Q Whom should I contact if I want to speak at a meeting?

A Please contact the Democratic Services Team on:

01427 676594/5 or email:
committeeadmin@west-lindsey.gov.uk

Q How do I know which Committee/Sub Committee I should be talking to?

A Where an item appears on the agenda for a meeting, it is easy – you speak at that meeting. If, however, you want to talk about something in general terms, it may be not quite so obvious. The Committee Administrators will be happy to advise you.

Q Can I ask very specific questions, for example, about my bin not being emptied?

A Yes, you can but rather than waiting for a meeting, you can telephone us to sort it out straight away. If you call the main switchboard on 01427 676676, you will be routed to someone who will deal directly with the problem.

Q **If I want to contact the councillors, how can I do that?**

A If you know who you want to contact, you can write or telephone. If you are not sure, the Committee Administrators will be happy to advise you.

Q **Does everyone have the right to speak?**

A Yes. We do, however, have to put a limit on the time which is available. Speakers are selected on a first come, first served basis so it is wise to register your wish to speak as early as possible. We try to fit as many people in as possible, but the practical limit is five.

Q **Do I need to let anyone know that I want to speak at the start of a meeting?**

A It is helpful if we have some advance notice. This will allow us to research the answer to your question. Please arrive at least five minutes before the meeting is due to start. If you do not give us advance notice of your question, it may not be possible for it to be answered at the meeting itself. If this is the case, you will be advised that you will be sent a written reply, a copy of which will be sent to all the councillors at the meeting.

Q **How long can I speak for?**

A You can speak for up to three minutes, although it is helpful if you can be briefer. Those replying are also asked to keep their speeches to less than three minutes.

Q **Is there anything that I can't talk about?**

A You can talk about anything in which the council has a role to play but questions on issues which are exempt or confidential under the 1985 Access to Information Act are not allowed. Please be aware that you will be speaking in public and press reporters may be present. Please do not say anything which you would not wish to be reported and be aware of the need to be factually correct in what you say. You should particularly note that you should not make

derogatory or defamatory remarks about other people. Any such comments may leave you open to legal action.

The Chairman of the meeting has the right to say that any question or statement is not appropriate and will not be accepted. He/she also has absolute discretion regarding the interpretation of this scheme and its temporary suspension, variance or withdrawal at a particular meeting if this would be conducive to the debate or in the event that it becomes, or threatens to become, disruptive to the conduct of the meeting or the proper and lawful exercise of the council's statutory powers and duties.

Q **May I ask a supplementary question on the same topic after my first question has been answered?**

A Normally no, but the Chairman of the meeting may decide to let you speak again if time allows.

Q **Can the same statement or question be put at every meeting?**

A No. To be fair, we must give everyone the opportunity of speaking. In particular, we need to avoid pressure groups using the time to seek publicity, or persistent misuse of the time by a few individuals.

Q **Where and when are meetings held?**

A Most meetings are held at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber, Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, the dates can be obtained from the Committee Administrators.

Q **Can I get a copy of the agenda before the meeting?**

A The agenda will be available at the meeting and will be available for inspection on the Council's website and at the council's offices five clear days before the meeting.

Q What happens if I do not have the chance to speak?

A Give your question to the Committee Administrator at the meeting. You will be sent a written reply and a copy of your question and the answer will be sent to all the councillors at the meeting.

Alternatively, you may raise the issue at the next meeting of the committee. If you wish to do this, please let the Committee Administrators know.

Q Can I ask questions of other speakers?

A No.

Q Can I use photographs or plans or circulate supporting documents?

A Documentation in support of oral representations is permitted provided a copy is submitted to the Committee Administration team by no later than 12 noon on the working day preceding the committee meeting.

Q What should I do if I want to ask a question but am unable to attend the right meeting?

A If you have a question, you are welcome to contact:

**West Lindsey District Council
Guildhall
Marshall's Yard
Gainsborough
Lincolnshire
DN21 2NA**

Telephone: 01427 676594/5

email: committeeadmin@west-lindsey.gov.uk

Q Whom do I ask if I have any other queries?

A If you have any questions not answered by this leaflet, you are welcome to contact Democratic Services as detailed above.

Other Leaflets in this Series:

Public Participation at Planning Committee Meetings
and
Public Question Time at Council Meetings

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