



**PUBLIC SPEAKING**

**AT**

**SCRUTINY AND REVIEW**

**COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

## 1. Introduction

Scrutiny is one of the most challenging aspects of the democratic process at the Forest of Dean District Council. Offering a new dimension to decision-making in local government, the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee plays a vital role to service improvement, promoting the well being of local communities and to the championing of public concerns.

To achieve some of the key aims introduced by the Local Government Act 2000, it is hoped public scrutiny will be conducted in ways that are open and transparent to everyone, whilst focusing on the needs and concerns of the public.

As a general principle, members of the public are not invited to take part in discussions or debates during committee meetings of the Forest of Dean District Council. However, to reflect the work of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee in seeking information on issues specifically relating to the people who live and work within the Forest of Dean, the council supports public participation during Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

The following information provides guidance to those members of the public who wish to speak at scrutiny committee meetings.

## 2. Guidance on asking questions

- a) Members of the public will be invited to raise questions at the beginning of each meeting. A maximum of 30 minutes will be allocated for this purpose.
- b) The question must be relevant to the business of the scrutiny committee to which it is put. If it is not possible to answer the question at the meeting, a response will be provided within ten working days of the meeting.
- c) Members of the public should submit their question **at least two working days before** the meeting to Democratic Services, Forest of Dean District Council, Council Offices, Coleford, telephone 01594 812625 or email [democratic.services@fdean.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@fdean.gov.uk)
- d) Assistance on how to present questions is available upon request from Democratic Services. Please telephone 01594 812625 or email [democratic.services@fdean.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@fdean.gov.uk) .
- e) The chairman of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee will decide whether the question is appropriate and whether the question will be taken at the meeting.
- f) To allow each member of the public wishing to participate at the meeting to speak, an allocated time limit of 5 minutes per speaker will be given.

## **2. Guidance for suggesting topics for scrutiny**

Members of the public may suggest items for consideration in any of the following ways:

- a) Using the form provided on the Council's website
- b) Writing to the chairman of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee care of Democratic Services
- c) Through their ward district councillor.

## **3. Providing evidence to scrutiny**

- a) The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee may invite members of the public to provide evidence or to discuss issues of local concern as part of their investigation. It may, for example, wish to hear from residents, stakeholders or members and officers in other parts of the public sector.
- b) Where a person is invited to attend a scrutiny and review committee meeting, an initial telephone call will be made to enquire whether the person is able to attend the meeting, followed by a letter, giving the maximum possible notice in writing.
- c) The letter will state the nature of the item on which the person is invited to give evidence and whether any papers are required to be produced for the committee. The letter will inform the person of the subject being scrutinised, and where appropriate, a list of questions to be answered.
- d) Where the committee requires the person to provide a written report, sufficient time will be given to allow for the preparation of the document.
- e) At the meeting, the chairman of the committee will provide a brief introduction to the members of the committee and the persons invited to give evidence. The chairman will also provide an overview of the item under investigation, including the aims, objectives and timescale.
- f) The chairman will remind those people invited to give evidence why the committee has invited them to attend the meeting and request that they give a brief statement regarding the item under scrutiny.
- g) Once the statement has been made, the committee will be given an opportunity to ask questions in a concise, jargon free manner. The person providing the evidence will be allowed to summarise the information.
- h) The committee will then be given an opportunity to discuss and review the evidence that has been presented before providing feedback on how they viewed the information and any actions they feel might be appropriate.
- i) The person providing evidence will be formally thanked for their contribution and given the opportunity to provide written feedback on the scrutiny process they have been involved in. They will also be informed of the outcome of the investigation.

## **4. Conduct**

- a) Members of the public must not abuse the privilege of participation by personal attacks on elected members, other participants or members of the public.
- b) Speakers will be required to respond politely to any question from the chairman and elected members of the committee.
- c) Where a number of speakers share the same viewpoint, a spokesperson may be required.
- d) Any speaker who makes a statement, which, in the opinion of the chairman, is defamatory, abusive, racially motivated or discriminatory, will be required to stop speaking and leave the meeting. The committee will be advised to disregard such comments.
- e) The chairman will have complete discretion on how public participation is conducted. If the above principles are not adhered to, the chairman may close that part of the meeting.

## **5. Media access to public meetings**

- a) The media will be invited to attend all public meetings and offered interview, filming and reporting opportunities, whenever possible.
- b) The Forest of Dean District Council supports the Ofcom Code and Guidelines on broadcasting standards. All arrangements for filming will be expected to adhere to these provisions, in particular those relating to the 'obligations of fairness and respect for truth' and 'fairness and impartiality' in the editing and transmission of interviews.

## **6. Agenda, reports and minutes**

Copies of committee agendas, reports and minutes will be available upon request from Democratic Services or by visiting the Forest of Dean District Council website at [www.fdean.gov.uk](http://www.fdean.gov.uk).

## **7. Where to send scrutiny questions**

Please submit to Democratic Services, Forest of Dean District Council, High Street, Coleford, Gloucestershire, GL16 8HG **at least two working days before** the meeting. In exceptional circumstances, the committee chairman, at his or her discretion, may accept questions submitted up to one hour before the meeting.

Please write the question out in full, stating the name, time and date of the committee you wish to speak at.

Please ensure that your full name and address, including a contact telephone number, are entered on the letter of submission.

## **8. Enquiries and assistance**

For guidance on procedures at meetings, please contact Democratic Services on telephone: 01594 812625 or email [democractic.services@fdean.gov.uk](mailto:democractic.services@fdean.gov.uk) .