



PUBLIC QUESTIONS POLICY

The Town Council welcomes questions, queries and challenges to its decisions by members of the Public and recognises that public engagement in local government is an important part of the democratic process.

However, the Council must balance the time and process for the response to questions received against the other obligations of the Council and its staffing capacity. With that in mind the Council have reviewed the process and procedure for the public to raise questions to ensure that it is clear as to when responses can be expected depending on the manner in which, the question is submitted.

1. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Town Council. Each Full Council meeting will include a 15-minute Public Participation section and each Committee meeting a 5 minute Public Participation section. This will be held within the meeting after the item on Declaration of Interests and provided for in the meeting Agenda.
2. Within the Public Participation section, Members of the Public can raise any issue relating to the Town or Middlewich Town Council business or areas of operation. The item will not necessarily be discussed but Councillors may ask questions of or seek clarification from the questioner or the Town Clerk. All items raised are at the discretion of the Chairman or person presiding at the meeting.
3. If a member of the public wishes to, they can raise a question in advance of the meeting; this must be submitted to the Town Clerk by email or in writing in the form of a question by 10.00am on the Monday of the week prior to the next Town Council meeting - ie 7 days prior to the meeting. This will enable the Council to discuss and provide a response on the item, if appropriate. Questions should be clear and concise.
4. For all items raised by Members of the Public, the Council may decide to provide a written answer. This will be the case if there is insufficient time to answer the question at the meeting or if the member of the public submitting the question does not attend the meeting.
5. Members of the public should check the Public Questions Log on the Council website at <https://www.middlewich.org.uk/meetings/> to see if their question has been raised within the last 6 months. If it has, and there is no material change to the answer provided originally the question will not be raised again.
6. Items submitted for the Public Participation section of the meeting should be a question or query, the personal views of the person raising the question should not form part of the question. The Council will not tolerate any grandstanding or point scoring statements as opposed to questions.
7. The Town Clerk will ensure that any questions submitted comply with this policy before adding them to the agenda. If they do not, the member of the public will receive a response explaining why the item has not been placed on the meeting agenda along with a copy of this policy.
8. If more than one question is submitted in advance by the same member of the Public, in order to ensure all residents are given equal opportunity for their questions to be answered, initially only the first question of those submitted will be answered. If time allows, the additional questions will be returned

to. If more than one resident has submitted multiple questions the second question from each member of the public will be answered and then the third and so on.

9. Any questions that are responded to in writing will receive a response prior to the next occurrence of the meeting that the question was raised at or submitted in advance for. The format of the response will match the manner in which, the question was submitted – be that by email or post.
10. Copies of all the questions responded to in writing will be posted on the Council website alongside the minutes for the meeting. The person submitting the questions will be kept anonymous for the purposes of the minutes and written questions.
11. Questions may also be raised outside meetings by submission to the Town Clerk by email at clerk@middlewich.org.uk. The Town Clerk will then speak to the relevant members or parties necessary to enable a response to be provided. The timescale for the response to a question submitted to the Clerk will depend on the nature of the question and the extent to which the involvement of other parties is required. The Town Clerk will endeavour to respond and acknowledge receipt of the question and provide more details as to the likely response timescale, within 7 days of the question being received.

Middlewich Town Council will not tolerate abuse against Councillors, Officers or Staff and as such if any questions submitted include content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive or contains content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, an individual they will not be answered and will be immediately deleted.

The terms of the Vexatious Complainers Policy should be read in conjunction with this Policy.

Adopted: April 2023

Welcome to the Council meeting of Middlewich Town Council

*A quick guide to 'Public
Participation' at meetings*

What is a Town Council meeting?

A Town Council meeting is a business meeting for the Town Council. It is where the Councillors discuss issues and make decisions on behalf of the Town Council.

Town Council meetings are held in public, the public have a right to come and observe the business conducted at the Council meeting.

Can I address the Council with questions, ideas or concerns at a Parish Council meeting?

YES! While legislation allows the public to observe Town and Parish Council meetings there is no statutory right for the public to speak at a Council meeting so, as part of its community engagement strategy, Middlewich Town Council sets aside some time for the public to address the Town Council during its monthly meetings. This time is near the beginning of the meeting and called '**Open Forum Public Participation**'.

Are there any guidelines for 'Public Participation'?



There are some guidelines the Council ask the public to observe during 'Public Participation'. These guidelines help the Council to continue to run an efficient and balanced meeting.

- The period of time designated for the entire 'Public Participation' session at a meeting shall not exceed **15 minutes** unless directed by the Chairman of the meeting.
- An individual member of the public shall not speak for more than **3 minutes**.
- A question shall not require an immediate response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question.
- The Chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given.
- A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct their comments to the Chairman of the meeting.
- Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the Chairman of the meeting shall direct the order of speaking.

Other than the 'Public Participation' item on the agenda can I join in with the rest of the meeting?

Outside of the 'Public Participation' item on the agenda, members of the public are very welcome to stay and **observe** the meetings proceedings. However, legislation does not permit members of the public to join in with the debate of Council or comment on any other items on the agenda. The Council kindly ask that this is respected at all times.



Council; Councillors; Clerk; Residents.

Working together as a team we all help to change our community for the better. We look forward to meeting you soon.

Disorderly Conduct at Meetings

The Councillors and the Clerk of Middlewich Town Council are a friendly and hardworking team who welcome the input of the residents of Middlewich.

The Council respectfully request that no member of the public disrupts the transaction of business at a meeting. Where a member of the public actively disrupts the Council meeting the rules on disorderly conduct are as follows:

1. No person shall obstruct the transaction of business at a meeting or behave offensively or improperly. If this is ignored, the Chairman of the meeting shall request such person(s) to moderate or improve their conduct.
2. If person(s) disregard the request of the Chairman of the meeting to moderate or improve their conduct, any councillor or the chairman of the meeting may propose that the person be no longer heard or be excluded from the meeting. The proposal, if seconded, shall be put to the vote without discussion.
3. If a resolution made in (2) is ignored, the Chairman of the meeting may take further reasonable steps to restore order or to progress the meeting. This may include temporarily suspending or closing the meeting.