



# **HAVING YOUR SAY AT MEETINGS**

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## Introduction

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? Or maybe you want to tell the Councillors your views about something they are going to discuss at a 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 that are asked most often by people who want to speak at Council meetings. It is split into five sections:

1. The differences between the Council, Cabinet, Committees and Panels, and how meetings are run.
2. General information about how to have your say, including rooms and who to contact.
3. Presenting petitions.
4. The public participation period immediately before meetings.
5. Speaking on agenda items.

The functions of the Cabinet, Committees and Panels are shown at the end of this leaflet.

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.

Please note: Special rules apply to decisions on planning applications made by the Planning Development Control Committee. If you would like to speak about a planning application the Council is deciding, please see the leaflet "Having Your Say - Planning Development Control Committee".

### Further Information:

If you would like further information about any of the matters dealt with in this leaflet, please contact Rosemary Rutins, Service Manager Democratic Services and Member Support, Appletree Court, Beaulieu Road, Lyndhurst, SO43 7PA.  
Tel: (023) 8028 5588. E-mail: [rosemary.rutins@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:rosemary.rutins@nfdc.gov.uk)

# 1. The Council, Cabinet, Committees and Panels

Q: What is “the Council”?

A: The Council consists of 60 Councillors who are elected by the residents of the New Forest District. Elections are held every 4 years. The Council makes major policy decisions, and sets the budget and Council Tax.

Q: What is the Cabinet?

A: A group of 6 Councillors, all from the majority political group (Conservative) represented on the Council. The Leader of the Council is elected by the full Council and serves for 4 years, until the next elections. He chairs the Cabinet and he has appointed the other 5 members. Each of them is the lead Councillor for an area of the Council’s work, called a portfolio. The law and the Council’s Constitution lay down the types of decision the Cabinet can, and cannot, take.

Q: What is a Committee?

A: A group of Councillors appointed by the Council. Committees are appointed “proportionally” - that is, they contain Councillors from more than one political group, in the same proportion as the political groups are represented on the Council.

Committees look after particular functions that the law says cannot be dealt with by the Cabinet. The Council’s Committees and the main functions each one looks after are set out on pages 14-16. Committees can decide most issues they are responsible for, but the Council sometimes has to make the final decision.

Q: What is a Panel?

A: “Panel” means an Overview and Scrutiny Panel. There are 10 Councillors on each Panel, and none of them are Cabinet members. Like Committees, Panels are appointed “proportionally”. Panels review the Council’s policies and can recommend whether or how they should be changed. They can also examine Cabinet and Portfolio Holders’ decisions to make sure they have not exceeded their powers.

Q: How are meetings run?

A: A Chairman controls all meetings. A Vice-Chairman usually helps the Chairman. Officers (paid employees of the Council) advise at meetings on procedural, legal, and technical matters. There are rules about conducting meetings, and the Chairman’s decision on how a meeting is run is final. Meetings are formal, but the Chairman tries to keep things as simple as possible so anyone who wants to speak or listen can follow what is happening.

Q: What is an Agenda?

A: A list of the business that the meeting will consider. A subject may only be discussed at a meeting if it is on the Agenda, although additional urgent matters may sometimes be discussed at meetings. A report on each subject to be discussed is usually attached to the Agenda. Officers prepare the reports and include the information needed to help the Councillors reach their decisions.

Q: How do I know what is on an Agenda?

A: The law requires Agendas to be published at least 5 clear days before a meeting (not counting weekends, bank holidays or the day of posting). You may see Agendas on the Council's website, [www.newforest.gov.uk](http://www.newforest.gov.uk), at all the Council's main and local offices, and through libraries in the District. Or telephone the Committee Administrator (see pages 14-16) to ask what is on an Agenda.

If the Cabinet is due to make a particularly important decision, the subject matter, and the likely date of the decision, may be included in the Council's "forward plan". You may see a copy of the forward plan at any of the Council's main and local offices, libraries in the District, or access it on the Council's website at [www.newforest.gov.uk](http://www.newforest.gov.uk) under "Council and Democracy/Councillors and Democracy/Forward Plan of Key Decisions".

Q: How are decisions reached?

A: The meeting goes through the agenda item by item. A proposal is approved if most of the Councillors present vote in favour of it. That is usually the final decision, but sometimes a recommendation is made to the Cabinet, to another Committee, or to the Council. Councillors will have read the agenda before the meeting, and long debates are not usually needed. If the Councillors present obviously support a proposal there might not be a formal vote. The Chairman may just declare the motion carried. Decisions appear later in the "minutes", which are the official record of the meeting. Minutes are published and available to the public. You can find them on the Council's website under Council and Democracy/Councillors and Democracy/Committee Documents.

Q: Why do officers attend and speak at meetings?

A: To give professional advice only. They are not members of the Council and do not vote.

Q: Where are meetings held?

A: Most meetings are held in either the Council Chamber or a Committee Room at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst. Occasionally meetings may be held at other venues. If you want to attend a particular meeting, ask the Committee Administrator (see pages 14-16) where the meeting will be held.

## 2. Having Your Say at Meetings

Q: Which meetings may I speak at?

A: All Cabinet and Panel meetings, and most Committee meetings (see below). Occasionally, if a meeting is discussing a matter on which the public have had other opportunities to express their views, the Chief Executive may decide that public participation will not be permitted.

In addition, there are public participation periods before meetings of some outside bodies that this Council organises.

Q: May I speak at full Council meetings?

A: The full Council's business is conducted in a very formal way. Most of the business that it considers has already been discussed by the Cabinet, a Committee or Panel, when the public have had a chance to speak, so the public may not talk on these matters at Council meetings.

But anyone may present a petition to the Council, so long as they comply with the conditions set out on pages 8-9 of this leaflet.

Q: Which Committees may I speak at?

A: At meetings of the Cabinet, Audit Committee, General Purposes and Licensing Committee, and any Overview and Scrutiny Panel, you may speak during the 15 minute public participation period at the start of the meeting, and/or on agenda items (pages 10-11 and 12-13 of this leaflet).

If you want to speak about a planning application the rules for speaking at the Planning Development Control Committee are slightly different. Please see the leaflet "Having Your Say - Planning Development Control Committee".

A member of the general public may not speak at meetings of a Panel appointed from the Appeals Committee. The Appeals Committee decides appeals by individuals against a Council decision that specifically affects that individual. The person or persons who appeal to the Committee (and sometimes other people who will be directly affected by the decision) are able to attend the meeting to put their case. If you ever decide to appeal to this Committee, you will be informed of the procedures before the meeting that considers your appeal.

Similarly when members of the Licensing Sub-Committee are considering applications under the Licensing Act 2003, only those members of the public who have made formal representations within the statutory timeframes can speak at these meetings. If you have made representations regarding an application under the Licensing Act 2003, you will be informed of the procedures and speaking rules before the meeting considers the application. At all other meetings of the Licensing Sub-Committee, there is a public participation period at the start of the meeting where members of the public can speak.

Q: How do I make my views known at Cabinet, Committee and Panel meetings?

A: There are two ways:

1. Time is set aside at the start of the meeting for the public to speak to Councillors about anything falling within the area of responsibility of the body that is meeting.
2. If you want to speak about something on the Agenda for that meeting, you may do so when the meeting discusses that item.

There are rules that make these processes fair for everyone. Pages 10-11 explain the rules for speaking before the meeting, and pages 12-13 explain the rules for speaking on agenda items.

Q: Who should I talk to if I want to speak at a meeting?

A: The Committee Administrator who deals with the meeting at which you would like to speak. A list is given at the end of this leaflet. There is a separate Public Speaking Organiser for the Planning Development Control Committee. For that meeting, please contact the public speaking organiser on (023) 8028 5345.

Q: How do I know which meeting I should be speaking to?

A: When 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 not be quite so obvious. All of the Committee Administrators listed at the end of this leaflet will be happy to advise you. For your reference there is also a list of the responsibilities of the Cabinet and each Committee and Panel at the end of the leaflet.

Q: If I speak at the session before the meeting, may I also speak about an agenda item at the same meeting?

A: Yes, but please remember you may not speak about an agenda item during the period before the meeting.

Q: May I ask very specific questions - for example about my bin not being emptied, or about street lights that are not working?

A: You may - but rather than wait for a meeting, why not telephone us to sort things out straight away? If you call the main switchboard on (023) 8028 5588 the Information Officers will route your call onto someone who can deal directly with the matter.

Q: If I want to contact the Councillors, how can I do so?

A: If you know who you want to contact, then write, telephone or e-mail direct. Full contact details can be found on the Council's website. If you are not sure, or if you want help, any one of the Committee Administrators will be able to advise you.

Q: What if I have restricted mobility, or am hard of hearing?

A: Our meeting rooms are accessible for wheelchairs and, if it would be helpful to you, and you let us know in advance, we can make sure someone is on hand to escort you, help with doors etc. The Council Chamber and main Committee Rooms at Appletree Court and the Council Chamber at Lymington Town Hall each have a sound amplification or hearing loop system. Please ask for details if you think this equipment might help you.

### 3. Presenting Petitions

If you live, work or study in the New Forest, and you wish to raise an issue of concern, one way to do this is to organise a petition or e-petition and the Council will consider the matter.

Please see full details at <http://www.newforest.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=10653>. We will treat something as a petition if it is identified as being a petition, and is signed by at least 10 people who live, work, or study in the area. When we receive your petition we will tell you how we intend to deal with it. If you would like to discuss the petition scheme please contact Rosemary Rutins or Melanie Stephens on 023 8028 5588.

Q: What general rules apply?

A: There are 3 main conditions:

1. At least 10 people who live, work or study in the New Forest District (including yourself) must sign the petition; and
2. The petition must contain a clear and concise covering statement that sets out the subject of the petition and also states what action the petitioners want the Council to take; and
3. The petition must include the name, address and signature of everyone that supports the petition.

Q: Who must I give written notice to?

A: Write to The Service Manager, New Forest District Council, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst SO43 7PA

Q: What details must I put in the letter to the Service Manager?

A: As the petition organiser you must give your name and contact details, including your address.

Q: Can I present a petition on anything that I want to?

A: The Council's scheme is flexible, but it is sometimes necessary to decide not to accept a petition. The main reasons that this may happen are:

- If the petition is judged to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate
- If the petition is submitted immediately before an election or referendum and is covered by the rules on "purdah".
- If the petition applies to a planning or licensing application, is a statutory petition (for example requesting a referendum on having an

elected mayor), or on a matter where there is already an existing right of appeal, where other procedures apply.

Q. Once I have submitted my petition, what happens next?

A. You will be sent an acknowledgement of the petition within 10 working days of its receipt. It will let you know what we intend to do with the petition and when you can expect to hear from us again.

If the petition is going to be considered at a meeting we will advise you of the arrangements for attending that meeting.

Most petitions that the Council receives have fewer than 1,700 signatures and will usually be submitted to the Cabinet, or to the Committee or Panel that would normally deal with the subject. If the petition contains more than 1,700 (approximately 1% of the population) it will be debated by the Council.

If the subject is something for which this Council is not responsible it may refer the matter on to the responsible body.

Q: Will I be allowed to speak when I present my petition?

A: Yes, you may speak for not more than 5 minutes to explain why you are presenting the petition and what action you want the Council to take. If you do not want to speak for the full 5 minutes, another person supporting your petition may also speak. But between you, you will only have 5 minutes to speak.

## 4. The Public Participation Period Before Meetings

Q: Does everyone have the right to speak?

A: The Chairman is in overall control of the meeting. He or she has the right to decide whether anyone (including Councillors) may speak at a meeting. We also have to put a limit on the total time that is available for the public to speak. This is 15 minutes. Speakers are selected on a first come, first served, basis. So it is wise to register your wish to speak as early as possible.

Q: Do I need to let anyone know in advance that I wish to speak?

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 10 minutes before the meeting is due to start, so we can explain where to sit and how to use any sound equipment.

Q: How long may I speak for?

A: For up to 3 minutes, although it is helpful if you are briefer. Councillors are also asked to keep their speeches to less than 3 minutes.

Q: Is there anything that I am not allowed to talk about?

A: You may talk about anything in which the Council has a role to play. Please be aware that you will be speaking in public, and that press reporters may be present. Please do not say anything you would not wish to be reported. Also, particularly on sensitive or controversial items, please be aware of the need to be factually correct in what you say. In addition, meetings that are held in the Council Chamber are audio recorded and copies of the recording are provided, if requested.

The Chairman of the meeting also has the right to say that any question or statement is not appropriate, and will not be accepted.

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

A: Normally not, but if time allows, the Chairman of the meeting may decide to let you speak again.

Q: May the same statement or question be put at every meeting?

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

Q: Can I record or film the debate at the meeting?

A: Subject to some provisos, yes you can. Audio recording is not intrusive and, as the Council will already have warned everyone present that this may happen, and indeed will happen in the Council Chamber, this will not cause any problem. If you wish to film then you may do so from a static position in the meeting room, provided you are not impeding anyone else. Also, while you are entitled to film the Council's elected members and officers, if another member of the public requests that they are not filmed, then please respect that request. More details on our rules for recording at meetings can be found by following the link below:

<http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=26253&p=0>

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

A: Please write down what you were going to say and give it to the Committee Administrator. You will be sent a written reply, and a copy of your question or statement and of the reply will be sent to all the Councillors who were at the meeting.

Q: What should I do if I have a question, but am not able to attend the right meeting?

A: Please write to Rosemary Rutins, at the address shown on page 2 of this leaflet. She will be pleased to arrange for a reply to be sent to you.

## 5. Speaking on Agenda Items

In general terms, many of the rules that apply to speaking at the start of the meeting also apply to speaking on agenda items, so please read that section as well.

Q: How long may I speak for?

A: The time is divided between 3 groups:

1. Supporters of the recommendation in the report
2. Objectors to the recommendation in the report
3. Parish/Town Councils.

Each of these groups has up to 3 minutes. Up to 3 people may speak for each group and the time is divided equally between them. The public speakers are called at the start of the consideration of the item, in the order above. They may not, however, take part in the debate.

Q: Will everyone have the right to speak?

A: I am afraid that the practical limit is 3 speakers from each group. To avoid disappointment, it is best to register your wish to speak as early as possible. The Chairman of the meeting also has the right to decide whether anyone may speak, or to say that any question or statement is not appropriate, and will not be accepted.

Q: May I speak about something that is going to be discussed by Councillors in private?

A: I am afraid not. The press and public will not be present for that item.

Q: Should I register in advance if I want to speak at a meeting?

A: Yes please. As there is a practical limit on the number of speakers, and places are allocated on a first come, first served basis, the earlier you are able to let us know, the better. We also need to know you would like to speak so that we can show you where to sit, how to use any sound system, etc. (Please note that a minimum period of notice must be given if you wish to speak at the Planning Development Control Committee. Please see the separate leaflet that applies to that Committee).

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

A: If you know someone who has successfully booked a slot to speak on that particular item you could contact them to see if they would be willing to make

any additional points that you have. Indeed, if a group of residents all share the same view, it is often very effective to nominate a spokesperson to speak for all.

Alternatively, you could write to or e-mail each of the Councillors on the Cabinet, Committee or Panel concerned. Their contact details are on our website.

# Duties and functions of the Cabinet, Committees and Panels

## CABINET

Committee Administrator: Jan Debnam (023) 8028 5588  
e-mail [jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk)

All matters other than those dealt with by the Committees and Panels listed below

## APPEALS COMMITTEE

Committee Administrator: Jan Debnam (023) 8028 5588  
e-mail [jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk)

Decides appeals or objections against Council decisions on:

- Discipline and grievances of Council employees
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Various housing matters
- Non domestic rate relief
- Certain licensing matters

Note: A member of the general public may not speak at meetings of the Appeals Committee. This Committee decides appeals by individuals against a Council decision that specifically relates to or affects that individual. Only the person or persons directly affected are able to attend the meeting to put their case.

## AUDIT COMMITTEE

Committee Administrator: Andy Rogers (023) 8028 5588  
e-mail [andy.rogers@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:andy.rogers@nfdc.gov.uk)

- Approves the Statement of Accounts
- Reviews the Council's financial progress
- Monitors risk management and governance
- Approves the Council's Annual Governance Statement
- Audit activity
- Risk Management and governance
- Whistleblowing, anti-fraud, corruption and bribery

## **GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE**

Committee Administrator: Melanie Stephens (023) 8028 5588  
e-mail [melanie.stephens@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:melanie.stephens@nfdc.gov.uk)

Elections

Health and safety at work

Licensing of:

- Animal breeding and boarding establishments

- Caravan and camping sites

- Food production and retail premises

- Gaming/lotteries

- Entertainment premises

- Riding establishments

- Skin piercing and tattooing

- Taxis and private hire

Parishes (certain functions)

Registration of electors

Licensing Sub-Committee

## **PLANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE**

Committee Administrator: Jan Debnam (023) 8028 5588  
e-mail [jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk)

Planning applications

Enforcement

Hedgerow protection

Consultee on:

- Development plans

- Certain highways matters

Note:

Special rules apply to public participation at meetings of this Committee. Please see the separate leaflet: "Having Your Say - Planning Development Control Committee".

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS**

There are three Overview and Scrutiny Panels: -

### **COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Committee Administrator: Melanie Stephens (023) 8028 5588; e-mail  
[melanie.stephens@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:melanie.stephens@nfdc.gov.uk)

### **CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Committee Administrator: Andy Rogers (023) 8028 5588; e-mail [andy.rogers@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:andy.rogers@nfdc.gov.uk)

## **ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Committee Administrator: Jan Debnam (023) 8028 5588; e-mail  
[jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk](mailto:jan.debnam@nfdc.gov.uk)

These review and scrutinise the Council functions for which each is responsible by:

acting as consultee, and making recommendations on, the budget, policy and strategy proposals.

Reviewing the implementation of Council policy and strategy and scrutinising executive decisions.