

Pembrokeshire County Council

Protocol for Public Speaking at Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings (including Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings and Call-ins)

Introduction

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny (O & S) Committees play a vital role in improving public services, promoting the well-being of local communities, championing the concerns of citizens and increasing the accountability of decision-making in an open and transparent way. Members of the public make an important contribution to the process and provide a valuable source of information and evidence for an O & S Committee in undertaking its functions.

Pembrokeshire County Council encourages the active participation of its citizens whenever possible and there are a number of ways the public can engage in the work of our O & S Committees. For example, you may request to attend and speak at an O & S meeting if the Committee is looking at a topic you feel particularly strongly about. Similarly, a Committee may invite you to attend a meeting to provide evidence on an issue it is considering (for example, when a Council decision might have a significant impact on its citizens).

The following protocol provides guidance to members of the public who submit a question and are invited to speak at O & S meetings, or who are invited by a Committee to give evidence.

How to submit a request to speak at an O & S Committee meeting

There is an opportunity for members of the public to speak at O & S meetings in respect of an item on a Committee's work programme or on a specific agenda item. Scheduled meeting dates are published on the Council's website at the beginning of a municipal year giving notice as to when a Committee will meet.

The main sources of information for people of how to get involved in the scrutiny process are Committee forward work programmes. These set out the purpose and focus of scrutiny topics and the meeting date at which the topic will be considered. Forward work programmes are available on the Council website and give advance notice to the public of opportunities to get involved in the scrutiny process.

In addition, the agenda and reports for specific meetings are available for the public to view on the Pembrokeshire County Council website at least 3 clear working days before the meeting.

1. Members of the public who wish to speak or provide a written submission for consideration on a specific agenda item should submit written representations (requesting the right to speak, identifying which Committee, and outlining what you wish to speak about) to the Partnership and Scrutiny Support Team at least two clear working days before the Committee meeting. The deadline will be strictly adhered to. Such requests should be sent to the Democratic and Scrutiny Services team by email: Democraticservices@pembrokeshire.gov.uk or by letter to: Democratic Services, Pembrokeshire County Council, County Hall, Haverfordwest, SA611TP. Forms can also be found on the Council's website at: http://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/content.asp?nav=101,2159&parent_directory_id=646.

2. Requests to speak at a meeting on a specific topic will be acknowledged on receipt. There is no automatic presumption that guarantees any party that they will be allowed to speak and the Chairman of the relevant Committee will decide whether to grant the request having consideration of the relevancy of the request to the Committee's work programme or to a particular agenda topic.
3. If there are a number of people who make requests to speak on the same topic they might be asked to nominate a single spokesperson to speak on everyone's behalf.

Providing evidence at an O & S Committee meeting

4. An O & S Committee may invite members of the public to provide evidence and to discuss issues of concern as part of its scrutiny of an issue, particularly if the subject matter is of local significance. It may, for example, wish to hear from residents, Members, businesses or any relevant stakeholder in regards to how Council decisions might impact on citizens and stakeholders. If an invitee does not wish to attend then there is no requirement to do so.
5. When the Committee invites a person to attend a Committee meeting, the person will be contacted by telephone in the first instance to ensure they are able to attend the meeting. This will be followed by an invitation in writing by letter or e-mail, giving the maximum possible notice prior to the relevant Committee. The letter will inform the person of the subject being scrutinised, the nature of the item on which the person is invited to give evidence, and where appropriate, a list of questions to be answered. Where relevant, it will also state whether any documents or written reports are required to be produced for the Committee. Following the meeting, the person will be advised on the outcome of the Committee's deliberations, together with any recommendations emerging from its considerations.

Public speaking at an O & S Committee meeting when a decision has been called-in

6. O & S Committees can also monitor the decisions of the Executive (Cabinet) through a procedure known as 'call-in'. This enables a Committee to consider whether a decision made by the Executive (but not yet implemented) is appropriate. Following a call-in, a Committee may recommend that the Executive reconsider the decision.
7. Members of the public may speak at an O & S Committee meeting when a decision has been called-in. The same process as above will apply with regard to submitting a request to speak at such a meeting. Following the Head of Legal & Democratic Service's decision to call-in the date of the Committee meeting will be posted on the Council's website at:
<http://mgenglish.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/mgWhatsNew.aspx?bcr=1&LLL=0>.

Please be aware that there is often a tight timescale between the Cabinet decision and the meeting of the relevant O & S Committee that considers the call-in.

What to expect at a Committee meeting

8. The Chair of the Committee will introduce those invited to speak at the Committee meeting. The Chair will also provide an overview of the item under investigation, including the aims, objectives and timescale of the work, and will remind the person invited to give evidence why the Committee has invited them to attend the meeting. The Chair will advise the person of the Council's filming and audio protocol. O & S meetings are webcast, and unless you expressly request not to be filmed / audio recorded you will be so recorded.
9. Your oral presentation / evidence must only address issues relevant to the matter under scrutiny. Any member of the public making submissions or providing evidence to the Committee is only allowed to speak for five minutes. The person will be allowed to ask the Committee through the Chair one supplementary question. Following this, the Committee will be given an opportunity to ask questions of a person providing information.

The Committee will discuss and review the evidence that has been presented before it and if necessary provide feedback on any further actions they feel might be appropriate.

10. Where a member of the public has requested to address a Committee on a particular topic, the Chair will invite the person to speak at the appropriate point of the agenda and inform them where they may sit. The person will be asked to give their name and provide details that may be relevant to the item being discussed, for example the name of a group they might be representing.
11. If invited to speak at a Committee meeting where a decision has been called-in, the person concerned will be allowed to provide information presented during the course of the Committee's discussions.
12. If a person has supporting documents such as photographs or surveys they would like the Committee to consider as part of their submission then these must be provided to the Democratic and Scrutiny Services team at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. No supporting documents will be allowed to be distributed during the meeting.

Conduct at a Scrutiny Committee

13. Members of the public speaking at a Committee should bear in mind that meetings are webcast live on the Council's website and are also open to the public and press.

It is important that anyone wishing to speak at a Committee meeting should do so in a responsible and respectful manner. Presentations / evidence must not include personal comments concerning any party, and you will be expected to respond politely to any questions from the Chair and the Committee.

The Chair will (if necessary following legal advice) make the final determination on public involvement. The Committee will be advised to disregard comments that are determined to be offensive.

Welsh Language

14. Facilities will be made available for those who wish to speak through the medium of Welsh. You are requested to indicate your language of preference when you make your request to speak, or when invited.