

# YOUR GUIDE TO COUNCIL MEETINGS



## **Introduction**

The purpose of this guide is to briefly explain how the Council meeting operates including its role in decision making, how decisions are taken and the public's role at the meeting. It covers 'Ordinary Council Meetings' Budget Council held in February and Annual General Meeting held in May.

## **Role of Full Council**

Full Council is attended by the Mayor and the 45 Councillors. It is responsible for deciding the Council's overall policies and setting the budget for the year. It also appoints the Council's Committees at the Annual Meeting. In addition, the Council provides opportunities to discuss local issues and is a means by which the Mayor and Cabinet can be held to account in public.

## **Filming Council**

The Council will be filming this meeting for publication on the web for public viewing. The intention is not to specifically film members of the public, however, it is possible that you may be filmed in the background. By attending the meeting you are agreeing to this condition.

A link to the film will be available from [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee) a few days following the meeting.

## **Public Conduct at Meetings**

We welcome all members of the public to the gallery to watch the Council meeting. However, we request that you show courtesy to all present and do not interrupt the meeting. Please also switch off mobile phones or turn them on silent.

If you are scheduled to present a petition at the meeting, please sit in the reserved seating in the front row and you will be called to address the meeting at the appropriate time.

## **Emergency Procedure.**

If the fire alarm rings please follow the instructions of the Facilities Staff who will direct you to the exits.

## **Procedure at meetings**

Just before the start of the meeting, the macebearer will ask everyone to be upstanding for the Speaker. The Speaker of the Council is the Chair of the meeting and is in charge of the debate. Their role is to control the meeting and to ensure that the business is carried out properly. The Speaker will determine the order of speakers requiring Members to raise their hand to indicate that they wish to speak.

The agenda for meetings typically comprises:

- Apologies for absence from Members
- Declarations of Interests.
- Minutes of the previous meeting.
- Announcements from the Speaker or the Chief Executive of the Council.
- Petitions.
- Mayor's report followed by Opposition Leader's response.
- Administration and opposition debates
- Reports requiring Council approval
- Members' Questions (30 minutes)
- Motions from Members received on notice.
- Any Urgent motions from Members

### **Order of business**

Members may change the order of business at the meeting in exceptional circumstances. For example, to consider an urgent motion (see below). In addition, Members may adjourn the meeting for a period of time or extend the time limit for the meeting (by up to half hour beyond the three hour limit). To change the order of business, a Member will need to formally move a motion seeking approval for the requested change. Any such motions will be put to the vote.

### **Petitions**

Up to four petitions may be presented at each Council meeting taken in order of receipt (any other petitions received before the meeting will be noted). A petition must contain at least 30 signatures of people who live, work or study in Tower Hamlets. Petitions with a greater number of signatures (2000 or more) may trigger a full Council debate.

Petitions must be received by the Democratic Services Team 12 noon at least nine clear days before the meeting. Contact details are on the agenda front sheet and the website. The process for considering petitions at the Council meeting is as follows:

- Petitioner(s) to address the meeting for three minutes (with additional time if an interpreter is used)
- Members then may ask questions of the petitioner(s).
- Members may debate the Petition if it's a Petition for debate and move a motion on the Petition.
- The Mayor or relevant Cabinet Member will respond to the petition.

The petition will then be referred to the relevant Chief Officer to provide a written response within 28 days.

### **Mayor's Report**

At each Council meeting, the Mayor has the opportunity to address the Council for up to six minutes summarising key events and engagements since the last meeting. A written report may be circulated beforehand. Following this, the Speaker will invite the Leader of the opposition political group to respond to the Mayor's report.

### **Reports**

Some Council decisions have to be made by the Full Council. Details are contained in reports included in the agenda pack. Reports are written by Council officers and usually include a recommended course of action.

### **Members' Questions**

A maximum of 30 minutes at the meeting will be allowed for Member questions as set out in the agenda. Members may also ask one brief supplementary question arising directly from the

original question or the reply. Any question not dealt with at the meeting will receive a written response.

### **Motions from Members**

The agenda normally includes motions from Members. In discussing these motions, Members may move amendments to the motion. If carried, the amended motion will become the motion for debate that will be put to the vote. Due to time constraints, Members may not debate all of the written motions on the agenda.

Time is allocated at each meeting for at least one motion from the Administration and one of the opposition groups to be debated.

### **Urgent motions**

Members may move urgent motions for debate on the night. The same rules of debate that apply to motions with notice (summarised above) apply to these motions.

### **Voting on items**

All matters for decision (motions, amendments reports etc.) will normally be determined by a simple majority vote, usually via an electronic voting system. If there are an equal number of votes for and against an item of business, the Speaker will have a second or casting vote.

### **Budget Meeting**

Each year Budget Council meeting(s) will be held for the purposes of setting the Council's budget and the Council Tax for the following financial year.

Petitions

### **Petitions**

Any person living, working or studying in the Borough, can present a petition for consideration at the Budget meeting which relates to the budget or the Council Tax. Details of the Petition process is set out above

The agenda for the budget Council typically comprises:

- Apologies for absence
- Declarations of interest from Members.
- Announcements from the Speaker or the Chief Executive of the Council
- Petitions relating to the Budget or the setting of the Council Tax.
- The Mayor and the Executive's proposals on the Council budget and the Council Tax.
- Any other items requiring the Council's approval

There are no Public or Members' Questions or Motions on Notice at the Budget Meeting

### **Budget Debate**

At the start of the debate, the Mayor and/ or the Cabinet Member for Resources will present their proposals. (The proposals and any supporting papers will be contained in the agenda).

Once the proposals of the Executive have been moved, the Speaker will invite the mover and seconder of each amendment in turn to speak and move their amendments.

Any proposed amendments will be published on the website before the meeting including Officers' comments.

After all the amendments have been moved, the Council will debate the proposals.

If necessary, Members may adjourn the meeting at any point to give further consideration to any matter.

At the end of the debate, the Mayor or the Cabinet Member who has moved the proposals may exercise a right of reply.

### **Voting Stage**

It is required by law that a recorded vote is held on any proposed amendment and the Budget proposal itself. This will be conducted through an electronic voting system.

The Council will firstly vote on each amendment, in the order they were moved, and will then vote on the budget proposals including any amendments agreed.

### **Decision**

If the Council adopts the budget proposals without amendment, the decision will take effect immediately.

If however, the Council votes to make any amendments to the budget proposals, it shall request that the Mayor reconsider the proposed budget in light of their amendments and resubmit the budget (amended or not) to a further Council meeting the following week.

If the Council still wishes to amend the Mayor's proposals, such a decision will require a two thirds majority of the Members present. If no valid amendment receives two thirds support, the Mayor's proposals are deemed adopted.

### **Annual General Meeting**

Each year, the Annual Council meeting will be held for the purposes of: electing a new Speaker of the Council, to appoint and elect Members to the Council's Committees.

### **Election of Speaker of the Council**

The first item of business at the AGM is to elect a new Speaker of the Council for the year ahead. Alongside performing civic duties, their duties include the task of Chairing the Council meetings, to control proceedings and ensure Members have a fair chance to contribute.

At the start of Council meetings, the Macebearer will ask everyone to stand up for the Speaker to enter the Council Chamber:

The process for electing the new Speaker at the Council meeting is as follows:

- The current Speaker of the Council will address the meeting on their term of office. Councillors may then thank the outgoing leader.
- The outgoing Speaker will then seek nominations for a new Speaker of the Council, from Members of the Council. A vote will be taken.
- Once elected, the new Speaker will address the Council meeting.

### **AGM Agenda**

The agenda for the AGM typically comprises:

- Election of Speaker
- Election of Deputy Speaker
- Apologies for absence

- Declarations of interest from Members.
- Announcements from the Speaker or the Chief Executive of the Council
- Mayor's cabinet and executive arrangements
- Establishment and Appointment of Council's Committees in accordance with the proportionality rules.
- Appointments to Committee and Sub – Committees.
- Confirmation of Committee Calendar of Meetings.
- State of the Borough Debate (1 hour)
- Any other items requiring the Council's approval

There are no Petitions, Members' Questions or Motions on Notice at the AGM.

### **State of the Borough Debate.**

To provide an opportunity for the Mayor and the Councillors to set out their views on the 'State of the Borough.

#### **Committee Papers**

For meeting papers and to be alerted when agendas have been published visit: [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee)  
 Council documents are also available on 'Mod.Gov' iPad, Android and Windows tablet apps downloadable for free from their respective app stores.



#### **Decisions and Minutes**

A decision sheet will be published on the website after the meeting. The draft minutes will be published on the website around 10 working days after the meeting.

Officers	Councillors	Public Gallery
Speaker		Public Gallery
Officers	Councillors	Public Gallery

Contact for further information: Democratic Services, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Town Hall, 5 Clove Crescent E14 2BG  
 Telephone 020 7364 4651 [Committee.services@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:Committee.services@towerhamlets.gov.uk)  
[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/committee)