

## **Surrey County Council Local Committee (Guildford)**

### **Protocol for public engagement (June 2011)**

#### **Introduction**

1. It is important that people who live and work in Guildford are able to influence what happens in the borough. A key aim of the Local Committee is to ensure that the aspirations and concerns of residents are taken into account when decisions are made about the local area.
2. Under Standing Order 41 of Surrey County Council's Constitution, Local Committees are allowed to draft their own protocols for public engagement. This document sets out the rules for asking questions of, presenting petitions to and speaking at the Local Committee for Guildford.
3. Any member of the public who is an elector of the Surrey County Council area or a local business is able to present a petition or ask the members of the Committee a question about Surrey County Council services. However, questions and petitions will not be allowed on:
  - a) matters which are "confidential" or "exempt" under the Local Government Access to Information Act 1985
  - b) planning applications
  - c) Rights of Way applications being considered by the Committee at the same meeting.

#### **Petitions**

4. At the start of a Local Committee meeting any member of the public who is an elector of the Surrey County Council area or a local business may present a petition.
5. The petition must contain 50 or more signatures, names and addresses of residents of voting age in Guildford Borough, or more than 75% of residents (not households) living in an area affected by the subject of the petition.
6. Petitions will only be accepted where the issue cannot be, or has not been, adequately resolved outside the Committee (by ordinary communication with officers, through the county council complaints procedure, or by local Member advocacy).
7. The Community Partnership and Committee Officer must receive the petition at least 5 working days before the meeting. If it is received at least 10 working days before the meeting, the petition will be listed on agenda papers.
8. Petitions can be submitted electronically through the Surrey County Council website: [www.surreycc.gov.uk](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk)
9. A spokesman for the petitioner may address the Committee for up to 3 minutes, but thereafter may not speak further.

10. The Committee will endeavour to provide a written response at the meeting. If it is not possible to provide a satisfactory response immediately, the petition will be referred without discussion to the next appropriate meeting of the Committee.
11. No more than three petitions may be presented at any one meeting of the Committee. The Community Partnerships Manager may amalgamate within the first received petition other petitions of like effect on the same subject.
12. The presentation of a petition on the same or similar topic as one presented in the last six months will not be allowed.

### **Informal Question Time**

13. Up to 30 minutes is reserved at the start of each meeting for informal questions. (The meeting usually starts at 7pm; the formal part of the meeting will start at 7.30 pm or earlier if there are not sufficient public questions). No notice period is required for asking an informal question. Only the questioner's name and the subject will be minuted.
14. Questions may not receive a full verbal answer immediately; however a written answer will be supplied within 10 working days of the meeting. If the question is particularly complex, then progress will be reported within 10 working days.
15. Questioners should indicate if their question relates to an item on the agenda. At the Chairman's discretion, they may be asked to reserve their question and speak at the start of the item (see the section below on public speaking).

### **Written Public Questions**

16. Any member of the public who is an elector of the Surrey County Council area or a local business may submit a written question. The questioner will receive a written response, which will be available in the room 30 minutes before the start of the meeting. The response may refer to a report on the item and cannot pre-empt the Members' discussion. Only the questioner's name and the subject will be minuted.
17. The Community Partnership and Committee Officer must receive the question at least 5 working days before the meeting. If it is received at least 10 working days before the meeting, the question will be listed on agenda papers.
18. The questioner may address the Committee for up to 3 minutes. Supplementary questions are at the Chairman's discretion.
19. There is a limit of 2 questions from any one resident or organisation per Committee; a limit of 10 questions overall per Committee. A question on the same or similar subject may not be brought back to the Committee for 6 months.

20. Questioners will be expected to demonstrate that the question cannot be or has not been, adequately resolved outside the Committee (by ordinary communication with officers, through the county council complaints procedure, or by local Member advocacy).

### **Written Member Questions**

21. The rules set out above for written public questions also apply for written Member questions, however Members only need to give 4 working days notice to the Community Partnership and Committee Officer.

### **Public speaking**

22. Individuals or representatives of organisations may apply to the Community Partnership and Committee Officer to speak on an item on the agenda, however this is at the discretion of the Chairman.
23. Notice should be given at least 48 hours before the start of the meeting.
24. Speakers will have up to 3 minutes at the start of item. Speeches will be summarised in the minutes.
25. Specific rules apply for Rights of Way applications (see below).

### **Rights of Way (ROW) including Byways Open to All Traffic (BOAT) applications**

26. The arrangements for public speaking on ROW matters are set out in full in Standing Orders 67.1-67.10 of the Surrey County Council Constitution.
27. Any member of the public or their representatives may apply to speak either for or against a particular application. They must first register their wish to speak by telephone or in writing (which includes e-mails) to the Community Partnership and Committee Officer by 12 noon one working day before the Committee meeting, stating on which item(s) they wish to speak.
28. Only those people who have previously made written representations in response to a ROW application (including an application relating to a BOAT) will be entitled to speak. Speakers must declare any financial or personal interest they may have in the application.
29. Registration of speakers will be on a first come, first served basis and taken in the order in which they are registered. The time allowed for public speaking, on each application, will be limited to 15 minutes for objectors and 15 minutes for supporters and to 3 minutes per speaker (i.e. a maximum of 5 each).
30. No additional information may be circulated by speakers at the meeting and they will have no right to speak or question Members or officers once they have made their submission. Speeches will precede the Committee's formal discussion on each application.

31. The applicant is also entitled to speak after all supporters/objectors have spoken to respond to any objections made by the speakers but not to introduce anything new. The applicant is allowed to speak in addition to the objectors/supporters.
32. The right to speak will only be exercised at the first meeting at which the application is considered and will not normally be the subject of further presentations at any subsequent meeting unless significant changes have taken place after a deferral by the Committee.

### **Getting an issue discussed**

39. If any member of the public would like an issue formally discussed at the Committee (listed as a formal item and a report prepared with recommendations for the Committee to discuss), they should contact the Chairman, a Member of the Committee, or the Community Partnerships and Committee Officer.
40. The Agenda Planning Group, consisting of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and one Borough Councillor will discuss the issue and decide whether and when the Committee should discuss it formally. The Chairman has the final decision on whether an issue is taken as a formal committee agenda item.
41. Members of the Committee may not propose an 'original' motion during the Committee (i.e. one which is not related to an item already on the agenda). Members may propose motions or amendments to recommendations related to items listed on the agenda. Motions and amendments should be proposed and seconded by Members whose names will be recorded in the minutes.
42. Urgent items or information may be taken at the meeting with the Chairman's approval, where a reason for the urgency is stated and recorded in the minutes.

### **Contacting your Councillor / Information for Councillors**

43. Contact details for Members of the Local Committee can be found here:  
[www.surreycc.gov.uk/guildford](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/guildford).
44. Members of the public wishing to provide information to the Committee are advised to contact their Councillors directly in advance of a Local Committee meeting.
45. Members of the Committee will only discuss matters contained in the Committee papers published and despatched one week before the meeting. Officers will not circulate other papers (submitted by members of the public) except at the Chairman's discretion.