

Article 3 – Residents and Public Participation

3.1 Residents' Rights

Residents have a number of rights. The following list is a general summary of rights in terms of information, the opportunity to participate and the ability to make complaints.

- (a) (i) **Petition scheme.** Residents who are concerned about a Council service or a decision that is about to be made may send the Council a petition which shall be considered and responded to in accordance with the Petition Scheme as outlined below.
- (b) **Information.** Residents have the right to:
 - (i) Attend meetings of the Council and its committees, except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and that part of the meeting is therefore held in private;
 - (ii) See agendas, reports and background papers, except where confidential or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and any records of decisions made by the Council and its committees; and
 - (iii) Inspect the Council's accounts and make their views known to the external auditor.
- (c) **Treatment.** Residents have the right to:
 - (i) Be treated with understanding and respect;
 - (ii) Have equal opportunity with other residents; and
 - (iii) Receive quality services provided to Best Value principles.
- (d) **Public Engagement.** Residents have the right to ask questions, receive answers and make comments at committee meetings in accordance with the following rules. Residents can also raise issues at Residents Forum.

Residents can participate in Committee meetings as follows:

- By asking a public question
- By making a public comment
- By submitting a petition

3.2 Questions to a Committee

Questions must detail which agenda item they are in connection with. Committee agendas are usually published on the Council's website five working days prior to the meeting. Residents should state their address when submitting questions.

Questions should be submitted to the relevant Governance Officer by 10am on the third working day prior to the meeting (for example for a committee meeting on a Thursday the deadline would be 10am on the preceding Monday; for a committee meeting on a Tuesday the deadline would be 10am on the preceding Thursday). Any questions submitted after this time will not be considered.

Written responses to public questions will be circulated to the questioner in advance or at the meeting. Residents can ask the committee chairman one supplementary question per question asked at the committee meeting, which will be answered without discussion. The supplementary question must be relevant to the original question put to the chairman.

Residents submitting questions are able to send a substitute to ask their supplementary question if they are unable to attend the committee meeting. The Governance Officer supporting the meeting should be made aware of this prior to the meeting commencing.

At the meeting a time period of up to 30 minutes is available for public questions and comments in total.

3.3 Comments to Committees

Comments must relate to an item being considered on a Committee agenda and provide members of the public with an opportunity to address Committee Members. Committee agendas are published on the Council's website five clear working days prior to the meeting.

Requests to speak should be submitted to the relevant Governance Officer named on the front page of the agenda and be received by 10am on the third working day prior to the meeting. Any requests to make comments after this time will not be considered.

At the meeting each speaker will have a time period of up to three minutes to address the committee. Committee Members may ask the speaker questions on the representation they have made to the committee.

Comments may also be made in writing within the same deadlines as above and these will be published as an addendum to a report.

3.4 Procedure for Questions and Comments at Committees

At the committee meetings a time period of up to 30 minutes, is available for public questions and comments in total.

Public comments will be received by the Committee before supplementary questions are asked. Where a resident has submitted more than one question, their second item or question will be considered after all other residents have asked their first supplementary question. Supplementary questions will continue to be asked in this way until there are no further questions or 30 minutes has elapsed.

3.5 Issues for Residents Forum

Issues must be received by the Governance Service by 10am on the fifth working day prior to the meeting for the item to be discussed at the Forum. Written responses to local matters will be provided by 5pm the working day before the Residents Forums take place.

The Forum Chairman has the discretion to accept issues with less than five days' notice if they deem the matter to be urgent. Responses to urgent matters will be responded to verbally by officers at the Forum meeting.

Councillors, MPs and Assembly Members are not permitted to submit items and questions for Residents Forum, but may be called on to comment on issues. Such comments will be invited entirely at the discretion of the Residents Forum chairman.

The Six Month Rule shall apply whereby matters dealt with cannot be raised again within this period. The Six Month Rule means that Residents Forum will not reconsider any issues discussed at a resident's forum or any decision taken by a committee in the six months preceding the date of the forum.

The Residents Forum may also be a forum for certain consultations from the Council as decided by the Chairman.

At Residents Forum issues will be considered in order of receipt. Where a resident has submitted more than one issue, their second item or question will be considered after all other residents have presented their first item. Issues will continue to be determined in this way until all issues have been considered.

The Chairman will determine issues in the following way:

1. Residents will have the opportunity to discuss the issue raised
2. Chairman, Chief Officers or other relevant officers may respond to the issues raised
3. Having considered the issues the Chairman can take the following actions:
 - note the issue and take no action
 - instruct that an appropriate named officer contact the resident within 20 working days to provide an additional response
 - instruct that Ward Members are notified of the issue.
 - decide that the issue be referred to the next meeting of an Area Committee for consideration, subject to the issue being within the terms of reference of an Area Committee

When determining issues in accordance with the options detailed above, the Chairman must give reasons for their decision.

Public questions and comments are not permitted:

- If they are defamatory, abusive or offensive
- If submitted from Council employees or trade unions on employment matters; there are avenues available for these to be addressed via the Terms of Reference of the General Functions Committee

The Chairman of the relevant Committee or Sub-Committee, in consultation with the Head of Governance, shall decide whether any particular comment or questions will be permitted.

3.6 Petitions

Petitions must have a minimum of 25 signatures and be relevant to the functions of the authority. The petition will be presented to the Governance Service who will forthwith present it to the relevant Director and/or the relevant Committee Chairman for information.

Petitions can either be submitted in hard copy to the Head of Governance or by using the authority's e-petitions facility. It is acceptable to combine paper petitions and e-petitions, providing the action the Council is being requested to take in the petitions are the same.

The address of the Head of Governance is as follows:

Head of Governance
London Borough of Barnet
Building 2, North London Business Park
Oakleigh Road South
N11 1NP

The authority's e-petition facility can be found here:

<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/mgEPetitionListDisplay.aspx?bcr=1>

E-petitions submitted on external websites can be accepted by the council. However, petitions hosted on external websites will need to be submitted by the lead petitioner to the Head of Governance in order for the petition to be accepted.

Petition signatures must be from Barnet residents otherwise they will not count towards the overall signature total. Petitions signatories must provide addresses to enable them to be verified.

A petition will not be accepted if:

- it is vexatious or abusive;
- it relates to any enactment or statutory provision;
- it relates to a safeguarding matter;
- it does not contain the address of signatories;
- it relates to a named individual or could reveal the identity of a person;
- it does not relate to the functions of the council;
- it is not clear what it is asking the council to do;
- it deals with an issue that has previously been resolved;
- it is repetitive, vexatious, or requires action which is unlawful or for which another council procedure is available

The Head of Governance will make a ruling on whether or not to accept a petition, taking into consideration grounds for rejection as laid out above.

On such an occasion where a petition is rejected, the Head of Governance (or his/her representative) will write to the lead petitioner and explain the reasons for rejection.

Petitions relating to planning or licensing applications, appeals or reviews will be treated as letters of representation and will be dealt with by the relevant service area and will be taken into consideration in dealing with the relevant application, appeal or review. For petitions falling within these categories, the reporting procedures below will not apply.

Petitions will be acknowledged within 10 working days. The acknowledgement will include information on how the petition will be progressed.

Petitions will be reported as follows:

Signatures	Forum and Procedure
0-24	No action required.
25 – 1,999 Signatures	<p>The petition will be reported to Residents Forum to which the issue relates. Where the petition relates to a borough-wide issue, the matter will be reported to the Residents Forum for the constituency area in which the lead petitioner resides.</p> <p>The Lead Petitioner will be given three minutes to present the petition to the Forum. Following the presentation the Residents Forum Chairman will decide to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take no action; • Refer the matter to a chief officer to respond to within 20 working days; or • Refer the matter to the relevant Area Committee (if funding is required)
2,000 – 6,999 Signatures	<p>Where the petition relates to the functions and responsibilities of an Area Committee it will be reported to the relevant Area Committee.</p> <p>Where the petition relates to the matters outside the functions and responsibilities outside of the remit of an Area Committee, the petition will be reported to the relevant Theme Committee.</p> <p>The Lead Petitioner will be given five minutes to present the petition to the committee.</p>

	<p>Following the presentation the Chairman and Committee Members have an opportunity to ask the Lead Petitioner questions. After the debate the Committee will decide to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take no action • Refer the matter to a chief officer to provide a written respond to Lead Petitioner within 20 working days; or • Instruct an officer to prepare a report for a future meeting of the Committee on the issue(s) raised with a recommended course of action
7,000 plus Signatures	<p>The petition will be considered by Full Council and the following process will be followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead Petitioner is given five minutes to present the petition; • Council Members have an opportunity to ask questions of the Lead Petitioner then debate the item. • The relevant Committee Chairman will respond to the issues raised in the petition and outline the decision route (if any) he/she proposes to take

Petitions are required to be received seven clear working days before the Residents Forum, relevant committee meeting or Full Council.

Any hard copy petition received will be published on the Council's website via the Council's e-petition facility and processed by the Council as documented in this section. Updates or responses to petitions will be published on the e-petitions section of the website once an officer has responded or a Forum, Committee or Full Council has received a petition.

3.7 Requests to speak at Planning Committees

Requests to speak should be submitted to the relevant Governance Officer by 10am on the third working day prior to the meeting. Requests will be accepted in the order received.

In addition to any Councillor and the Applicant (or their representative) two residents may speak. Such speakers shall be one for and one against the application unless there is no resident wishing to speak for the application in which case two residents may speak against the application.

At the meeting, each speaker will have a time period of up to 3 minutes to address the committee. Committee members will then have the opportunity to question the speaker.

3.8 Complaints

Residents have the right to complain to:

- (i) the Council itself under its complaints scheme;
- (ii) the Local Government Ombudsman (after using the Council's own complaints scheme);
- (iii) the Monitoring Officer about a breach of the Members Code of Conduct.

3.9 Disorderly Conduct

If a member(s) of the public or press (or a Councillor) interrupts the proceedings at any meeting, the Mayor or Chairman may warn him/her. If s/he continues the interruption and a warning has previously been given, the Mayor or Chairman may order his/her removal from the meeting place. In the event that the meeting is disrupted the Mayor or the Chairman may adjourn the meeting and if required clear the public gallery. The meeting will then reconvene to consider the remaining business without the public.