

Best Practice for the Submission of Agenda Items for Council Meetings

1. Technically, an item proposed by councillors for an agenda is a 'motion' which 'should be capable of being understood and of being accepted or rejected when put to the vote'¹. However, it is accepted that some items will be added to initiate a debate on an issue which may not evolve into a situation where a decision (and thus a vote) is necessary.
2. The timings for the submission of agenda items and the issue of the agenda itself are contained in the Council's Standing Orders:
 - a. "No motion may be moved at a meeting unless it is on the agenda and the mover has given written notice of its wording to the [Clerk] at least 7 clear days before the meeting. Clear days do not include the day of the notice or the day of the meeting"².
 - b. "If the [Clerk] considers the wording of a motion received in accordance with standing order 9(b) is not clear in meaning, the motion shall be rejected until the mover of the motion resubmits it, so that it can be understood, in writing, to the [Clerk] at least 5 clear days before the meeting"³.
 - c. "The [Clerk] shall at least three clear days before a meeting of the council, a committee or a sub-committee, serve on councillors by delivery or post at their residences or by email authenticated in such manner as the [Clerk] thinks fit, a signed summons confirming the time, place and the agenda (provided the councillor has consented to service by email) [...]"⁴. This section goes on to say that the agenda must be made available to the public.

These requirements also apply to extraordinary meeting and the Annual Assembly, but not to working group meetings (they are not public meetings)⁵.

If requests for the addition of items do not meet these timescales, their inclusion cannot be guaranteed and will have to be carried over to the following meeting.

3. Best practice is for the wording of a proposed item to be concise, but include enough information for those attending the meeting to understand what the Council will be asked to discuss/consider⁶.
4. Once an agenda is issued, only in the most exceptional circumstances (and if time permits, see 1c above) will it be reissued to accommodate additional items or corrections.
5. A proposed agenda item may be supplemented with a briefing paper or an explanatory note, and where this occurs best practice is for that document to be made available to

¹ National Association of Local Councils (2013) *Local Councils Explained* (NALC, London), p.158.

² Great Waltham Parish Council (2022a), *Standing Orders*, s.9(b), as amended at Council meeting 18th July 2022.

³ Great Waltham Parish Council (2022b), *Standing Orders*, s.9(d). Available at: <https://e-voice.org.uk/greatwalthamparish/copy-of-parish-directory/policy-files/>. (Accessed 29/06/2022).

⁴ *Ibid.*, Great Waltham Parish Council (2022b), *Standing Orders*, s.15(b). Also, per *Standing Orders*, s.3(b), 'The minimum three clear days for notice of a meeting does not include the day on which notice was issued, the day of the meeting, a Sunday, a day of the Christmas break, a day of the Easter break or of a bank holiday or a day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning'.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Great Waltham Parish Council (2022b), *Standing Orders*, s.3(b).

⁶ At its meeting on 23rd April 2018 the Council's 'Chairman stated that he wanted future agenda items to be made in writing and phrased in terms of a proposal or motion and these are to be clear and unambiguous on what the item is about. This is in line with EALC guidelines to ensure that other Cllrs and members of the public know enough about the issue so as to be prepared in advance. The Clerk would ensure these objectives were met and that the agendas included the name of the proposer so that they can introduce the item at the meeting'.

the Clerk for issue with the agenda. In these instances, the member submitting the item and the Clerk should ensure that 'great care [is] taken over documents that are confidential, or for another special reason publicity of which is prejudicial to the public interest'⁷.

6. If events conspire, a briefing paper or explanatory note may be issued to councillors between the issue of the agenda and the meeting (with copies being made available at the meeting to any members of the public in attendance). This should happen not less than 24 hours before the scheduled commencement time of the meeting.
7. Because councillors will have had no opportunity to scrutinise them beforehand, it will not be regarded as best practice for a councillor to introduce at the meeting itself a briefing note or explanatory paper in relation to an item they have placed on the agenda. At the meeting a vote can be taken on whether (a) the explanatory paper or explanatory note so introduced should be accepted for discussion and (b) the agenda item should be deferred to the next meeting to ensure proper scrutiny of the supplementary information.

⁷ Ibid, *Local Councils Explained*, p.163.