

HOW DO COMMITTEES WORK?

A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR UNDERSTANDING
HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE IN COMMITTEES



Contents

Contents	1
Introduction	2
Executive Committees	3
Meeting Agendas.....	4
Making Decisions.....	5
Making Decisions - votes	6
Non-Executive Committees	7
Deputations.....	8
Rules for Deputations	9
Contact Us.....	10



HAPPY TO **TRANSLATE**

If you would like this information in another format such as Braille, large print or translation, please email the Interpretation and Translation Service its@edinburgh.gov.uk quoting reference 24-1589

Introduction

At the City of Edinburgh Council (Council), decisions are made in one of two ways:

- through a decision of the Council or one of its committees, or
- by an officer of the Council using powers granted to them through the [Scheme of Delegation to Officers](#).

This short guide will explain how decisions are made by the Council or its committees so that you can understand and follow what is happening in a meeting. It will also explain to you your role if you are invited to make a deputation to a meeting.

Using the Term “the Council”

The term “the Council” actually has two slightly different meanings. It can, on one hand, mean the organisation that is the City of Edinburgh Council. But it can also mean the specific meeting when all of the elected councillors (all 63 of them) come together and make specific decisions. This usually happens on a monthly basis and is sometimes referred to as “full Council”. For the purposes of this guide, the words Council and full Council will be used to differentiate between the two meanings.

Executive Committees

Executive committees make decisions on those matters which are not “quasi-judicial”, that is not of a legal or statutory nature. These are where the Council tends to make decisions on policies and significant matters.

Each committee has 11 councillors (or members) on them, except the Policy and Sustainability Committee which has 17 members. One member will have been chosen to be the convener, whose role it is to chair the meeting.

As well as councillors, council officers will attend meetings to provide advice and support and will be available to answer questions from councillors on matters of business before it. Also in attendance, and usually sitting next to the convener, will be the committee clerk who supports the convener on matters of meeting procedure and process.

All meetings are broadcast live and are available for future viewing on the Council’s [webcasting portal](#).

The Executive committees are:

- Policy & Sustainability Committee
- Finance & resources Committee
- Education, Children and Families Committee
- Culture and Communities Committee
- Homelessness and Fair Work Committee
- Transport and Environment Committee.

Meeting Agendas

Every meeting will have an agenda which is published on the Council's [website](#). These are made available six working days in advance of the date of the meeting. No business may be considered at the meeting that is not listed on the agenda unless the convener rules that they believe that the matter is sufficiently urgent that it cannot wait until the next meeting of that committee. If this happens, it will be made clear at the meeting.

The agenda comprises several sections, which are standard and consistent across all executive committees:

1 Order of Business

Any changes to the running order, any extra business (that has been deemed urgent) or any items withdrawn from consideration.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillors need to tell the meeting if there are any items on the agenda for which they have a conflict of interest, in accordance with the [Code of Conduct for Councillors](#).

3 Deputations

People can address the committee on any matter listed on the agenda for that meeting (more on this later).

4 Minutes

The committee will agree, or otherwise, the accuracy of the minutes of its last meeting. A minute is a record of proceedings and the decisions which were made at the meeting.

5 Forward planning

The committee's agreed work programme for the year as well as a list of outstanding actions from decisions which have been made by the committee, other committees and the full Council.

6 Business Bulletin

Updates and information which are not for decision.

7 Executive decisions

All of the reports and items of business, which will be considered in turn, that require a decision from the committee.

8 Routine decisions

Reports and items of business, which will be considered in turn, and which may also require a decision to be made or could be just for the committee to note the contents of the report, on matters that are more routine in nature.

9 Motions

Items of business, which shall be taken in turn, which councillors themselves have placed onto the agenda for consideration

If required, there may be sections 10 and 11 which is where any matters which are considered confidential will be heard and members of the public will be asked to leave the meeting at this point, and the webcast will be stopped.

Making Decisions

Part 1 – the report

When a committee is being asked to make a decision on something, there will, normally, be included in the agenda for the meeting a report by an officer of the Council. This will explain what the committee is being recommended to decide and to support councillors make a decision, it will provide detail on the background to the issue as well as information explaining why the recommendation is being made, including details on risks to the Council and any other substantive considerations which the committee needs to be aware of.

The convener will invite an officer to speak to the committee summarising the report and highlighting any key parts.

Part 2 – questions by the committee

This is an opportunity for councillors to ask questions of Officers, to seek clarity on parts of the report, or to obtain some other relevant information. This part can be quite informal with the convener using their discretion on whether councillors can ask multiple questions.

Part 3 – the formal part – motions, amendments and addendums

Once all questions have been asked, a member of the committee (usually the convener) will propose a motion (this is what they are asking the committee to agree and can be just the recommendations listed in the report).

Other councillors are then entitled to propose amendments (which seek to change that proposal) or addendum (which seek to add additional text to the decision but without substantially changing the terms of the motion).

Amendments and addendum (and any motions which are different from the recommendations listed in the report) will have been published the previous day and will be available on the website.

Time limit for items of business

Each item of business, except deputations, has a time limit of 40 minutes. This time starts from when the officer who is introducing the item has finished speaking and before councillors are invited to ask questions. The 40 minutes also does not include the time taken for holding a vote (where required).

Making Decisions - votes

If there is only a motion with no amendment, the committee will usually agree this without any further discussion.

Otherwise, there will be a formal debate:

- the proposer of a motion, amendment or addendum is allowed to speak for up to four minutes.
- each then requires another councillor to second it, and that councillor can speak for up to three minutes.
- any other councillor (who has not moved or seconded something) can speak as part of the debate for up to three minutes.
- finally, the mover of the motion will have a right to reply.

During their speeches, the movers will advise if they are willing to incorporate all, or part, of an amendment or addendum into their proposal.

It is feasible that the mover of the motion will incorporate everything into their proposal which means that the final decision will be an amalgamation of all these proposals and usually means that there is no need to hold a vote.

If, at the end of all this, the committee is still faced with more than one proposal, then it will need to vote on the proposals before it can determine what the final decision is going to be.

Where a vote is required, the convener will ask the clerk to the committee to conduct this part of the meeting. The clerk will summarise what proposals are being considered and will detail if the movers of any have accepted all, or part, of other proposals.

To become the decision, a proposal requires to receive the support of a majority of the councillors on the committee. On an 11-councillor committee, it needs to attract six votes and on a 14-councillor committee, it needs to attract eight votes.

The clerk will, in turn, ask for votes for each proposal. If no single proposal attracts a majority of those councillors voting, then the proposal with the lowest number of votes will drop off and the process is repeated until a single proposal has a majority voting in support of it. This then becomes the decision of the committee.

This is the same process at meetings of the full Council, except that with up to 63 councillors voting, a proposal may need to achieve 32 votes to become the final decision (depending on how many councillors are present).

Non-Executive Committees

The process will work exactly the same for other types of committees too. However, they may have set rules on the procedure, for example, hearing applicants speak in support of an application/hearing people objecting to an application.

The Council's non-executive committees are:-

- Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee
- Planning Committee
- Regulatory Committee
- Development Management Sub-Committee
- Licensing Sub-Committee
- Traffic Regulation Order Sub-Committee
- Local Review Body.

Deputations

Executive committees and the full Council include on their agenda a section called “deputations”. This is a part of the meeting set aside to provide an opportunity for people to address the committee and the councillors on a matter which is on the agenda for that meeting.

There are two types of deputations:

- written deputation – this is where the person has submitted a document (such as a letter) to the committee for the councillors to read and will be circulated to the councillors before the meeting
- verbal deputation – this is where the person making the deputation attends the committee and speaks (for up to five minutes).

(You are allowed to submit a written deputation and still make a verbal deputation to support the contents of the written submission.)

Those making a verbal deputation may choose to attend in-person in the meeting room or online via Microsoft Teams.

Deputations are normally only permitted from an established organisation or group and those presenting should be office holders of that organisation/group.

It is the committee that determines whether or not to hear a deputation, although it cannot discuss the merits of the case presented by the deputation when doing so. Deputations are not permitted for quasi-judicial items.

Rules for deputations

1. Deputations should be no more than four people and have five minutes total to present their case. If there is more than one deputation on an item, then the Convener can change the time limit.
2. One hour is allocated to all deputations including questions. This time limit is not at the discretion of the Convener or committee to change.
3. Questions to deputations are limited to one per political group (or any independent members if any). The time limit for questions to each deputation is ten minutes.
4. The item relating to the deputation should be heard in the order laid out in the agenda. The Convener can change that under the agenda item 'Order of Business'.
5. Deputations are advised not to criticise named Council officers. Often there is no right of reply and naming officers, particularly junior officers, on a webcast is unfair and unnecessary. There is no issue with a deputation criticising officers generally, but they should refrain from naming them. If an officer is criticised by a deputation, then the convener should request that they keep any criticism general and avoid naming individuals.
6. Deputations should not say anything that could be considered defamatory to another person or organisation and should not share confidential or commercially sensitive information. Doing so could risk legal action being taken against the person making the deputation.

Contact Us

If you have any questions about a meeting, you can contact Committee Services by emailing committee.services@edinburgh.gov.uk or, if you want to ask questions about a specific meeting, you can contact the committee officer named on the meeting agenda.

Notice of meeting and agenda

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00 am Thursday, 22nd August, 2024

Dean of Guild Court Room - City Chambers

This is a public [meeting](#) and members of the public are welcome to attend or watch the webcast live on the Council's website.

The law allows the Council to consider some issues in private. Any items under "Private Business" will not be published, although the decisions will be recorded in the minute|

Contacts

Email: xxxxx.xxxxx@edinburgh.gov.uk / xxxxx.xxxxx@edinburgh.gov.uk

Tel: 0131 529 4264

