

Part 5: Section 6- Public Participation Guide

A healthy democracy depends upon active citizenship. Citizens are encouraged to make conscientious use of their roles as both voters and members of a wider community, and this guide gives an overview of the ways in which you can do that.

- Attending meetings

We encourage the public to attend all meetings of the Council and its committees, that are held in person or remotely in some circumstances. Members of the public may use social media to report on proceedings at meetings as long as this does not disrupt proceedings, or unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so.

As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chair or the Democratic Services Officer clerking the meeting so that those present are aware.

Details of what meetings are coming up are published on the Council's website.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk>

Meetings of the Full Council and Cabinet are live-streamed and details of how to view meetings on-line are available on the Council's website.

<https://councilstream.com/burycouncil>

The agenda and papers are normally published on our website at least five working days in advance of the meeting. Draft minutes of the meeting are also published on the website as soon as possible after the meeting.

- Why are some meetings private?

On some occasions an agenda item includes information which may be personal to an individual, which would compromise the commercial position of the Council or another individual or organisation or which there are other particular legal or employment reasons for asking the public to leave the meeting for discussion of that item. When this is the case, we will explain the reasons why and, as far as is legally possible, will afterwards provide a public summary of the decision taken.

- Asking questions at meetings of the Council

Which meetings can the public ask questions at?

Questions can be asked at public meetings of:

- The Full Council
- Cabinet
- Health and Wellbeing board
- Licensing and Safety Committee
- Scrutiny Committees
- Locality Board Bury Bee Local Network Forum

A period of up to 30 minutes, will be allocated for questions and supplementary questions. This period may be varied at the discretion of the Chair.

Who can ask questions?

Questions can be put by anyone living, working or studying in Bury.

What notice is required for questions?

A question must be delivered by email (democraticservices@bury.gov.uk) by no later than Midday two working days before the date of the meeting. Each question must provide the name and residential/business address of the questioner (although only the name and town will be published).

How many questions can be asked?

A member of the public may ask one* question at any public meeting of the Council as listed above. (*=See below for supplementary questions)

What is the scope for questions?

Questions should relate to the function of the committee where they are being asked. A question at the full Council can be addressed to any Chair or Cabinet Member and must relate either to something that the Council is responsible for or that affects the Borough.

We will not consider any question that is:-

In multiple parts

Not about a matter for which the Council has responsibility for or which affects Bury,

- Is defamatory, offensive or frivolous,
- Substantially the same as one submitted in the previous six months which has been put at a meeting of the Council*,
- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information
- From a Council employee and is related to their employment,
- Relates to a Planning or Licencing Application or appeal against a committee decision.
- Is submitted by a publicly declared candidate for election during the pre-election period.

What happens at the meeting?

Time is made available early on the agenda for any accepted questions to be dealt with. Copies of any questions and available answers will be published on the Council's website before the start of the meeting, and will be made available to members of the public who attend the meeting.

You will be asked to confirm your attendance at the meeting to present your question.

If you are not able to attend the meeting the question will not be dealt with at the meeting and a written response will be provided.

A questioner who has put a question in person can also ask one supplementary question, without notice, in response to the reply to their question. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply given. The chair can reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds detailed in the section above. The Chair will invite the questioner to put a supplementary question to the Councillor named in the notice.

What form will the reply take?

The answer may be either a direct oral answer, a referral to an existing publication, or if the question requests service information a referral to an officer to respond in writing. If the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, if the questioner or the member to whom the question is put is absent, or the time allowed for public questions has expired, a written answer will normally be provided within ten working days.

There cannot be any discussion on questions but any matters raised by a question can be referred to the relevant Cabinet member or the appropriate committee to considered.

Consultation and Engagement

Consultation is a conversation that leads to a decision where the views of a community should be taken into account. Decision makers must ensure they have taken into account all views and information before reaching a decision in particular around statutory purposes.

‘Engagement’ is a term that is frequently used within local government and relates to the dialogue the council and its partners have with its residents and communities.

Effective engagement needs a tailored method which builds on our relationships with residents and other stakeholders across our partnerships. As we know from the work through our Neighbourhood Teams, our communities all work differently and will prefer to engage with us using different methods. Sometimes it may be appropriate just to inform our residents and communities about local issues or challenges the public sector faces through routine communication channels, while at other times we will seek to consult and involve residents and communities in much greater depth for both local and statutory reasons.

Bury’s LET’s Do It! Approach sets out the commitment to inclusive dialogue with communities to shape and priorities, This includes at a neighbourhood level through the work of Public Service Leadership Teams, community Partners & Communities Together [PACT] meetings, including the attendance of Council and partner agencies at community settings, meetings and network. Similarly, this takes place from thematic perspectives, for example through Circles of Influence which engages young people in the Borough and participation opportunities in place-shaping of regeneration schemes.

In general engagement with residents and other key stakeholders does not end with a decision being taken; there may often continue to be a need for ongoing engagement to ensure policy decisions are effectively implemented.

Consultation is used to give local people a voice in our decision making and an opportunity to influence. It also provides the Council with an opportunity to listen and learn from local people before decisions and priorities are set. For the Council in addition there are legal implications if a consultation is not run for something that is deemed statutory. In general consultation is a good thing to do to encourage residents participation, understand resident satisfaction and shape activities around residents needs.

The Council utilise a Consultation Checklist to support officers when undertaking consultations. This provides guidance around statutory requirements and best practice methodology.

The Council encourages as many people as possible to give their views on decisions which affect them through appropriate consultation. Details of live consultations and how to get involved are available on the Council website at <https://www.bury.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/consultations> . You can also find information about past consultations there.

Communications and marketing

We want everyone in Bury to feel informed, involved and able to have their say. We have an overarching communications strategy that sets out this aim as well as our principles, channels (or methods) of communications and clear objectives to create the right conversations to help us achieve priorities. This section is intended to give a short overview of the parts of the communications strategy that identify our channels and how anyone in the borough should be able to use them to help them participate in, and contribute to, our shared success for the borough. Our communications are guided by the principles of being clear, accurate, timely, accessible and, where possible, two-way. That means we use a mix of channels so you can choose what works best for you:

- **Council website** – the main hub for news, service updates, meeting agendas and consultation details.
- **Social media** – follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X for updates, videos and opportunities to find out about our work, comment and share your views.
- **Local media** – we work with newspapers, radio and TV to keep you informed about decisions and events.
- **Community networks** – including faith forums, ward councillors, and local groups where we share information and listen to feedback.
- **Email and direct mail** – sign up to our newsletters and get important updates straight to your inbox or home.
- **Face-to-face engagement** – from public meetings and consultations to community events and focus groups.
- **Out-of-home advertising** – messages on billboards, bus stops and other public spaces to reach people across the borough.
- **Video and storytelling** – short videos and case studies showing how council decisions make a difference in real lives.

We aim to make every interaction simple, inclusive and meaningful, so you can help shape the future of Bury.

Our approach to communication is always evolving. The channels we use today may change as technology and audience preferences shift, so this section gives a high-level overview rather than listing every platform. Social media platforms, for example, are constantly changing in effectiveness and some even cease to exist, and we will adapt to ensure we continue to reach people in the best way possible.

These channels are often intended to echo, amplify and signpost people to the other

methods of participation identified in this guidance. We may promote our formal public meetings and committees, run campaigns to promote voter registration and remind people of upcoming elections, and we may explain consultations in simple ways to draw people to respond in full.

However, it is important to remember that, where some of these corporate communications methods provide a good place to provide us with insight and views to continuously improve our services, channels such as social media are not a substitute for, example, voting in elections or submitting a formal response to a consultation.

- Petitions

We welcome petitions from those who live or work in Bury and recognise that petitions are one way in which people can let us know their concerns or the strength of public feeling.

What is the scope for petitions?

Petitions must relate to a matter over which the Council has powers or duties and may be rejected if they: contain language or statements which are defamatory, frivolous, vexatious, discriminatory, false, or otherwise offensive; disclose confidential or exempt information; name individuals, or provides information where they may be easily identified, e.g. individual officers of public bodies; make criminal accusations; contain advertising statements; refer to an issue which is currently the subject of a formal Council complaint, Local Government Ombudsman complaint or any legal proceedings; or relate to a matter where there are other statutory processes in place for dealing with these matters (such as planning or licensing application matters or statutory petitions for a referendum.

How can a petition be submitted?

Petitions need to be submitted online and an online facility for running a petition is provided on the Council's website. There is no standard format for a petition but it must include:

- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition. It should state what action the petitioners wish us to take;
- the name and address and signature of any person supporting the petition, which must be not fewer than 50 people; (the Council will use its discretion where there are fewer than 50 signatories in cases where there is clear local support for action)
- contact details, including an address, for the petition organiser who will

be the person we will contact to explain how we will respond.

What happens once a petition has been submitted?

All petitions sent or presented to the Council will receive an acknowledgement within 10 working days of receipt explaining how we will respond.

Details of all petitions received, and of our response, will be published on the website. The contact details of the petition organiser or signatories to a petition will not be placed on the website.

If your petition has been signed by a certain number of people who are registered to vote in the Borough (currently 2500) then you may request that the petition is scheduled for submission at the next ordinary meeting of the full Council. If that is the case the petition organiser will have up to 5 minutes to briefly present the petition at the meeting.

- What do Councillors and officers do?

What Councillors do

Councillors are directly elected to represent the people and therefore have to consider not just the interests of their ward, but those throughout the whole Borough.

Your Councillors are responsible for making sure that the services that the council provides meet the needs of residents and those who work in Bury. They do this by setting the overall policies and strategies for the Council monitoring the way in which these are implemented. Councillors have a complex role and act in a number of capacities: as committee member, constituency representative and party activist.

The full Council of 51 members is responsible for agreeing the main policies and priorities for all services, including the Council's budget. The Cabinet have responsibility for all decisions which the law, or the Council, does not require to be taken by others and agrees policies and actions to implement the budget and policies set by full Council. Councillors who are Cabinet portfolio holders have more specialised roles in agreeing particular policies, representing the Council while at the same time working with other agencies to tackle issues such as improving overall health and wellbeing, social care and safeguarding, education, housing, transport, and promoting economic growth within the Borough.

What Council officers do

Council officers are the people who work for the Council and who are paid to deliver the services agreed by Councillors.

Officers help Councillors to develop policies and objectives through providing professional expertise and advice but they must remain impartial and serve the Council as a whole. Their main role is to provide the public with the highest possible standards of service within the budget that the Councillors set and in accordance with the priorities agreed by the Councillors.

What can my Councillor do for me?

Your Councillor can:

- be contacted to discuss your problem or ideas to improve the ward or borough
- help you if you need information or are dissatisfied with a Council service by advising or directing you to someone who can help sort out your problem, and can sometimes progress the case on your behalf
- as a community leader, put forward proposals to improve the ward they represent which may include bringing together different community groups to develop a case for change
- campaign on local issues
- represent your community within the Council and to other organisations
- speak at Planning Control and Licensing and Safety Committees on matters affecting the ward they represent
- ask questions or put forward views on your behalf at public meetings of the Council
- present petitions on your behalf
- get an issue (either within the remit of the Council or on a matter affecting the borough) debated at the full Council by submitting a motion.

Decisions

How do I know what decisions are being taken about matters that affect me or where I live?

We provide on our website (Forward Plan) summary information about future significant decisions to be taken by the Cabinet, together with contact details so that you can find out more information or provide your views. You can also contact your ward member and ask them to put forward your views on your behalf.

Planning or licensing applications which have been submitted are also published on the Council's website so that those who may be affected are able to make comments on the proposal.

The agendas and minutes of meetings are published on the website, and where a decision has been taken by a Cabinet member or officer, the decision report and notice of the decision are published on the website.

Are all decisions recorded and published?

Many are, but there are lots of day to day decisions which are not published. The Council has decided that officer decisions with a financial value of less than £100,000 will not be published unless there is a legal requirement to do so. This is because the number of such decisions would make it impractical to publish.

Why is some information kept confidential?

We aim to publish information unless there is good reason not to. Sometimes a decision takes into account information which may be personal to an individual, or which would compromise the commercial position of the council or another individual or organisation. There may be particular legal or employment reasons for not making the information public. When this is the case we will explain why the information cannot be made public, and will periodically review whether those reasons remain valid. If they do not we will then release the information.

How long is information about decisions kept?

Generally, the law requires information to be available for public inspection for six years from the date of the decision.

How do I find out about decisions taken by partnerships?

Bury Council works with a wide range of partners to achieve shared objectives in an efficient and effective way. We keep a register of strategic partnerships on our website which includes information about where decisions taken by those partners is recorded and how you can find out more about them.

What if I can't find the information I am looking for?

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives you a general right of access to all types of recorded information that we hold. More information about how to make a request, and about your other legal rights to information, can be found at:
Access to information

[Freedom of Information request - Bury Council](#)

Other ways of getting involved

Planning

Information about planning applications submitted is available on the Council's website and public notices are displayed in the area affected. You may submit comments on a planning application which will be considered by the decision-maker. If the application raises unusual or sensitive planning issues you can ask your ward member to request that the application is considered by the Planning and Control Committee rather than a single officer.

If you have provided comments on a particular planning application which is considered by the Planning and Control committee you will be asked whether you wish to register to speak at the committee to present your views. Three minutes is generally set aside for public speaking in objection/support to an application and registration is on a first come first served basis.

Scrutiny reviews

You may request that a matter or concern be considered for inclusion in the future work programme of a scrutiny committee. The committees cannot include every suggestion but prioritise items taking into account: the significance and impact of the issue; the ability of scrutiny input to add value; the need to avoid any duplication; the timeliness of scrutiny involvement and the resources available to undertake the work.

The committee may invite members of the public to submit their views or evidence to inform its work; when they do this the call for evidence will be publicised.

Vote

Elections for Bury Council take place on a four year cycle. For year one, two and three elections are held for a third of the Council, with no elections scheduled to be held on the fourth year of the cycle, as well as national elections and GM Mayoral elections. Your vote in all these elections and any other referendums that take place is important, but in order to vote you must be on the electoral register. Information about how to register is available on the Council's website.

Volunteer

We provide a wide variety of services to people in Bury, particularly to those who are vulnerable and have complex needs. As more pressure is placed on our budget, and on the budgets of partner organisations, different ways of delivering these services are being developed. Individuals and communities are doing more to help each other and themselves. If you are interested in

volunteering or have an idea for your community you would like to develop more information is available at Volunteering.

Youth Parliament

Bury Council values the voice of young people and supports participation through the UK Youth Parliament and local youth engagement initiatives.

- What is the Youth Parliament?
The UK Youth Parliament gives young people aged 11–18 the opportunity to influence decisions and campaign on issues that matter to them. Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) are elected locally and represent the views of young people in their area.
- How can young people get involved?
 - Stand for election as an MYP when opportunities arise.
 - Take part in consultations and campaigns led by Youth Parliament.
 - Attend Youth Parliament sessions and events, which may include debates on local and national issues.
- How does Bury Council work with Youth Parliament?
 - We invite Youth Parliament representatives to attend relevant Council meetings and contribute to discussions on issues affecting young people.
 - We consult Youth Parliament on policies and strategies that impact young residents.
 - We promote Youth Parliament activities through our communication channels to encourage wider participation.

For more information on Youth Parliament and how to get involved, visit UK Youth Parliament or contact Bury Council's Democratic Services team at democraticservices@bury.gov.uk.

www.buryvcfa.org.uk/volunteering or call 0161 518 5550

Find out more...

The Council's website provides lots of advice and information as well as access to online services and you can sign up to receive updates on particular matters of interest:

www.bury.gov.uk