

Participation at public meetings — public forum

Thank you for coming to our Council meeting and being part of the democratic process for Otago Regional Council. This handout gives you helpful information about our meetings and speaking guidelines.

What is public forum?

Public forum is where members of the public can present their thoughts and ideas to our councillors.

Up to 30 minutes near the start of each meeting are set aside to hear from the public. **You can attend public forum either in person or online.**

To speak in public forum, you must register at least 24 hours before the meeting by filling in the registration form on our website at orc.govt.nz/register, emailing our governance support team on governance@orc.govt.nz or contacting our customer service centre on 0800 474 082.

Meetings can be held in various parts of Otago, so please check the location of the meeting you want to attend. All requests to speak will be forwarded to the meeting chairperson by the governance support team for approval.

How long can I speak for?

Speakers can speak for up to five minutes. No more than two speakers can speak on behalf of an organisation during public forum.

Where the number of speakers presenting in the public forum exceeds six in total, the chairperson has discretion to restrict the speaking time permitted for all presenters.

Start by introducing yourself, your organisation and the topic you will be talking about. Please bring printed copies of any information you might wish to distribute to the 12 councillors.

If you wish to make an electronic presentation, please ensure that you have emailed it to the governance support team at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Meeting rules

Our meetings are governed by Standing Orders, which are meeting rules to enable local authorities to exercise their decision-making responsibilities in a transparent, inclusive and lawful manner.

Where do I sit?

Please try to arrive before the meeting starts and sign-in at the Council reception. Then please make yourself known to the governance support team, who will show you the Council Chamber and where to sit.

As you enter the room, there are three rows of seating to the left and right; this is the public gallery. Please come in quietly and take a seat. We will let you know when it is your turn to speak and where to present from.

Will the councillors ask me questions?

When you have finished speaking, the Chairperson can allow councillors to ask you questions if they want to clarify anything you talked about or find out more. Please note that this is not a forum to ask councillors questions.

Please be aware that no debate or decisions will be made at the meeting on issues raised during public forum, unless related to items already on the agenda.

Restrictions

The chairperson can decline to hear a speaker, or stop a presentation at any time, where:

- ▶ A speaker is repeating views presented by an earlier speaker at the same public forum.
- ▶ The speaker is criticising elected members and/or staff.
- ▶ The speaker is being repetitious, offensive or disrespectful.
- ▶ The speaker has previously spoken on the same issue.
- ▶ The matter is subject to legal proceedings.
- ▶ The matter is subject to a hearing, including the hearing of submissions where the local authority or committee sits in a quasi-judicial capacity.

If you wish to video or take photographs during a formal open meeting, you must seek permission from the chairperson before the meeting starts.

As meetings are open to the public, there may be media present. Members of the media may approach you with questions after you have spoken. It's up to you whether you respond to these questions or not.

After you have spoken, you are welcome to stay and listen to the rest of the public parts of the meeting (if online, you can watch the rest of the meeting on YouTube).

You will be notified by the chairperson if agenda items are to be addressed with the public excluded and asked to leave the room. Public excluded items usually happen at the end of the meeting, after all public items have been dealt with.

Tips for participating in meetings online

Before you join a Council meeting online via Zoom, we recommend these tips:

- ▶ **Test your tech in advance:** make sure your internet connection is stable and test your microphone and camera.
- ▶ **Find a quiet, well-lit space:** choose a location with minimal background noise and distractions.
- ▶ **Join a few minutes early:** this allows time to handle any last-minute complications and to be relaxed and ready to present.
- ▶ **Your name:** please ensure when you join the meeting that your name is correct and is not your device name, otherwise we will not know who you are. You are able to edit your name when joining the meeting, or once joined, click on 'Participants', go to yourself, choose the three dots (...) to the right and rename.
- ▶ **Waiting room:** when joining a Zoom meeting, you will be in the wait room until it is your turn to speak; don't worry, we know that you are online. After you finish, please leave the Zoom meeting; you can follow the rest of the meeting on the ORC YouTube channel.
- ▶ **Mute your microphone when not speaking:** please always join the meeting on mute and mute your microphone when you are not speaking.
- ▶ **Use headphones (if you have them):** wearing a headset or earbuds can improve audio clarity for both you and other participants. Noise-cancelling headphones are highly recommended.