

Public Access Statement.

The current practice of not allowing members of the public to present and read out their public access statement has no justification in law or as a public health consideration.

This is for three reasons.

1. It goes against Avon Fire Authority practice.

The Fire Authority website makes it clear with regard to the rights of residents “to present a petition, make a statement, or as leader of a deputation”. I emphasise **make a statement**. The Frequently asked Questions section makes this clearer: “The total amount of time allocated at each Authority meeting for public access will be no more than 30 minutes, and each speaker will speak for no more than 5 minutes. The Chair shall have discretion to extend these time limits.”

2. It is not a Public Health requirement.

There is no health risk in allowing a member of the public to read out their statement in a virtual meeting situation. There is therefore no justification as in your ‘AVON FIRE AUTHORITY MEETINGS INFORMATION IN RELATION TO VIRTUAL MEETINGS’ guidelines for the following:

“Public Access Statements will not be able to be presented at the meeting by the author but will be received by Members and published along with the minutes of the meeting”.

3. It is not a requirement in law.

To quote your own guidance:

“Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 makes a number of changes to the legal requirements for holding and convening Fire Authority ... meetings.”

More pertinently:

“The public must be able to hear (and preferably see) meetings live, though rights to public access statements **may** be restricted or modified.” I emphasize the **may** here. It is not a legal requirement and can only be justified on non-existent public health grounds.

This may explain why Bristol City Council, BANES Council and South Gloucestershire Council all allow full public participation in their meetings. Avon Fire Authority does not.

I would urge the Authority to change this rule for future meetings in order to allow the public as much participation as possible.

Mrs Nelum Arshed.

FAQ

Rules on virtual meetings. Public Access Statements – the system to submit a public access statement will remain the same and all requests should be submitted at least two working days prior to the meeting. (Deadline dates are provided on the Avon Fire Authority website). Public Access Statements will not be able to be presented at the meeting by the author but will be received by Members and published along with the minutes of the meeting.

Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 make a number of changes to the legal requirements for holding and convening Fire Authority (and other public bodies) meetings.

The public must be able to hear (and preferably see) meetings live, though rights to public access statements may be restricted or modified.