



Disruping a public meeting

Name of the law: Section 1 of Public Meetings Act 1908, Electoral Meetings are governed separately under the Section 97 of Representation of the People Act 1983.

Relevant to: Anyone planning to protest at a public or election meeting.

Note that any meeting that is wholly or partly in the open air is a 'public assembly' and subject to [conditions imposed by the police under the Public Order Act 1986](#).

For information on protesting at private protests, see our guide [here](#).

What counts as a public meeting?

A public meeting is one that takes place where the public or a section of it has access including by invitation or payment, including on private premises, to discuss matters of interest.

All manner of meetings are included ranging from debating societies to organising meetings for protests.

Electoral meetings are dealt with separately and comprise those political meetings happening during election campaigns.

What are the relevant offences?

It is an offence under s1 of the Public Meetings Act 1908 and the s97 Representation of the People Act 1983 to act, or incite others to act in a disorderly manner for the purpose of preventing the business for which the meeting was called.

If a police officer suspects someone of committing this offence they can demand the person give their name and address at the request of the chair of the meeting. Refusal to give their name and address, or giving a false name of address has a penalty of £200 fine.

The above two offences are the same for s97 of Representation of the People Act 1983, covering electoral meetings.

Meetings in the open air that are not on private land are subject to other police powers, see our guide to [s12&14, 14ZA of the Public Order Act 1986](#).

What is the maximum penalty?

6 months imprisonment or an unlimited fine.