

# Another local council reconsiders prayers

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A councillor in Winchester in Hampshire has called for an end to the saying of prayers at the start of the main council meeting.

Councillor Jim Maynard objects to the mayor's chaplain leading the prayers at the start of the full Council meeting held in the conference chamber around eight times a year. Mr Maynard said: "I think it is inappropriate that we should be having ceremonies and prayers as part of the council. We are not a religious body, we are here to represent everyone. I hope to spark a debate about it. I'm not anti-religious but I don't believe these ceremonies have a place."

He tabled a question at the last Council. Council leader George Beckett said: "Over the years, a few members who did not wish to participate in prayers have remained outside the council chamber. Technically, prayers are not part of the formal council meeting."

Cllr Maynard, who has been on the council for 11 years, believes the tradition only dates back to 1982 and has been ignored by several mayors, including Labour's Chris Pines who did not have a chaplain. He said his question was sparked by the court case initiated by the National Secular Society and involving a councillor in Bideford, Devon.

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