

# SWANBOURNE PARISH COUNCIL

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS POLICY

### Public participation at the Parish Council meeting

All members of the public and press are welcome to attend meetings of Swanbourne Parish Council and have a legal right to do so under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. Although there is no statutory right for members of the public to speak at these meetings, Swanbourne Parish Council is committed to community engagement, and as such residents are warmly invited to attend and contribute during the public participation item.

From time to time confidential items may be discussed in which case the press and members of the public are excluded in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

***The Parish Council meeting is not a public meeting but a meeting conducted in public.*** The public are asked to respect the fact that this is a meeting to conduct Council business and interruptions during Council business are not permitted.

### Purpose

Public participation is an opportunity for members of the public to:

- (a) Make representations,
- (b) Ask questions or
- (c) Give evidence relating to the business to be transacted.

Questions should ideally be submitted to the Parish Clerk by email two working days prior to the Council meeting. This is to allow sufficient time for research and preparation of an appropriate response.

If members of the public wish to raise comments about matters such as street lights, potholes etc, unless it is pertinent to a matter before the Council and contained in the agenda, these areas of concern should be raised with the Clerk who will, if necessary, bring a resolution to a subsequent Parish Council meeting.

### Structure and conduct

The agenda is the official order of business for Parish Council meetings. By law, the Parish Council cannot take action on items or issues that are not listed in the agenda. The agenda will indicate when the public participation will take place. This will be early on in the agenda so that Parish Councillors may take into account any views expressed when reaching their decisions.

The public participation agenda item will be for a period of fifteen minutes. A maximum of three minutes is permitted for a member of the public to speak. Supplementary comments or questions are solely at the discretion of the Council Chair.

In the event of several people wishing to speak either in favour or against an issue, the respective group(s) will be requested to select one spokesperson to address the Council.

One person wishing to speak either in support or against an issue will be allowed to address the Council even if no other person wishes to present an opposing argument.

Written statements must be received by the Clerk by noon on the day of the meeting.

The Chairman has the right to deem a question or statement as inappropriate and will not be accepted.

A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct their comments to the Chairman of the meeting and should raise their hand when requesting to do so. Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the chairman shall direct the order of speaking.

Pre submitted questions will be answered by the Chairman or the Clerk, following which the questioner will be allowed to ask one supplementary question. If the supplementary question is not able to be answered at the meeting, a written reply will be sent to the questioner as early as possible after the meeting, but in any case, within 14 days of the meeting whenever possible.

Neither Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made under public participation. A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require a response at the meeting and there should be no debate or discussion between the Council and the public. The chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given. Members of the public are therefore requested to leave their contact details with the Clerk before leaving the Council meeting if they wish to receive a reply to their query.

Councillors with a prejudicial interest in an agenda item will be allowed to speak during this agenda item (and then leave the room when the item is considered).

Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes. If the issue is on the agenda, then it will be discussed under the appropriate item.

Members of the public will not be allowed to speak during the debate by the Council. The Chairman may decide to adjourn the meeting where Councillors express a wish to seek additional clarification from members of the public.

All persons present are expected to act respectfully and will not act in a manner that demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates. All statements, questions and responses, challenges to statements, complaints or criticisms must be made politely.

All statements, questions and responses must be factual and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to personal views against an individual.

Offensive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. If a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of a meeting, the Council reserves the right to curtail the contribution of that person and exclude them from the meeting. In the event of serious disorder the Chairman has the right to adjourn the meeting for a short time to allow order to be restored.

## **Recording**

A brief record of topics raised at public participation will be included in the minutes of that meeting. Any libellous, offensive or discriminatory comments will not be minuted.