

## **SOMERCOTES PARISH COUNCIL**

### **PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS:**

Meetings of the Parish Council are not public meetings but members of the public have a statutory right to attend meetings of the council as observers.

They have no legal right to speak unless the Parish Council Chairperson authorises them to do so. However, as part of its community engagement, the Parish Council has set out a period of 30 minutes for public participation when members of the public are invited to speak.

Electors of the Parish are invited to speak on any item on the Parish Council Meetings Agenda without any prior notice. Should Electors wish to speak on any other matters then they should write to the Parish Clerk ten clear days before the meeting to allow the Parish Clerk to consider if the matter is relating to Parish Council business and for inclusion as appropriate on the Parish Council Meeting Agenda.

Members of the public should not be involved in the decision-making of the Council. The Council should not make any instant decisions at the behest of members of the public on items that are not included in the agenda.

As a matter of best practice the public forum will be kept separate from the debate of the councillors.

Members of the public are welcome to stay for the Council meeting after the public session as observers, but will not be able to join in the discussion unless invited to do so by the Chairperson.

Members of the public may be excluded by a resolution of the meeting for specific items which need to be discussed in confidence (e.g. staffing matters, tenders for contracts, some legal issues).

### **RULES**

- This session will be limited to a maximum of 30 minutes.
- The time for each member of the public to speak is limited to 5 minutes.
- If more than one member of the public wishes to speak on the same topic then they should nominate one person to speak on their behalf. This will avoid duplication and make the best use of the public participation period.
- Written statements must be received by the Clerk at least 3 days prior to the meeting.

- Public Forum is an opportunity for members of the public to (a) make representations, (b) answer questions or (c) give evidence relating to the business to be transacted.
- The Chairperson has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted.
- Neither Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made under public participation.
- 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.
- A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require a response and there should be no debate or discussion between the Council and the public.
- A brief record of topics raised at public participation will be included in the minutes of that meeting. But libelous, offensive and discriminatory comments will not be recorded.
- If the issue is on the main Parish Council Agenda then it will be discussed under the appropriate item. Members of the public not staying for the meeting 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.
- All persons present will act respectfully towards every other person present and will not act in a manner that demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates him or her. All statements, questions and responses, challenges to statements, complaints or criticisms must be made politely.
- All statements, questions and responses must be related to the facts of the matter and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to personal views on any person.
- Please note that offensive or threatening behavior will not be tolerated.
- If a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of any meeting the Council reserves the right to curtail the contribution of that person and exclude a disorderly person.
- No person shall obstruct the transaction of business at a meeting or behave offensively or improperly. If this is ignored, the chairperson of the meeting shall request such person(s) to moderate or improve their conduct.
- If person(s) disregard the request of the chairperson of the meeting to moderate or

improve their conduct, any councillor or the chairperson of the meeting may move that the person be no longer heard or be excluded from the meeting. The motion, if seconded, shall be put to the vote without discussion.

- If a resolution made is ignored, the chairperson of the meeting may take further reasonable steps to restore order or to progress the meeting. This may include temporarily suspending or closing the meeting.