

Sedbergh Parish Council

Public Participation at Meetings



1. Introduction:

1.1 This policy statement relates to all formal meetings of the Council, including meetings of the Council's Committees. The Scheme applies to anyone who: lives in the parish, or, represents a business or voluntary group/organisation in the parish.

1.2 All meetings of Sedbergh Parish Council are open to the public unless their presence would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons. The public's exclusion from part or all a meeting requires a resolution which gives reasons for such exclusion and this will be recorded in the minutes.

1.3 Members of the public may make representations, answer questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda.

1.4 The Council aims to ensure that its meetings are as 'user-friendly' as possible to members of the public and the Chair of the meeting shall be able to exercise reasonable discretion in applying this policy scheme, *subject always to the need to ensure orderly debate and the need to ensure that meetings are not unnecessarily prolonged.*

2. Procedure at Monthly Meetings of the full Council:

2.1 The agenda for the meeting shall make provision for 'Public Participation' and, subject to paragraph 2.2 below, any person wishing to address the meeting shall do so under that agenda item. The Chair shall ensure that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the 'Public Participation' item on the agenda shall take place at approximately 7.40pm, with meetings commencing at 7.30pm.

2.2 In the event that members of the public are in attendance at the commencement of the meeting, the Chair shall enquire if such persons wish to address the meeting on a specific agenda item and, if so, they will be permitted to speak for not more than 3 minutes immediately prior to the agenda item in question being considered. Where necessary to ensure the smooth running of the meeting, the Chair will recommend that the order of agenda items be varied to accommodate such participation by the public.

2.3 Each member of the public addressing the meeting on non-agenda items under 'Public Participation' shall be permitted to speak for not more than 3 minutes. Members of the public will be encouraged to avoid repetition and, where appropriate, to appoint a spokesperson to present a collective view of those present.

2.4 The time made available for public participation at the meeting will not normally exceed 15 minutes.

3. Procedure at Committee Meetings of the Council:

3.1 In the event that members of the public attend a Committee meeting of the Council, the Chair of that meeting shall explain the nature of the business to be discussed and, subject to paragraph 3.2, shall agree the most suitable time for such public participation.

3.2 A person wishing to address a Committee meeting of the Council shall normally be permitted to do so at the beginning of the meeting, immediately following 'approval of minutes of the previous meeting' (where applicable).

4. General:

4.1 Whilst Council members might put questions to any person who has addressed the meeting, there shall normally be no further participation by such person once he or she has addressed the meeting.

4.2 Neither Councillors, nor the Clerk, are obliged to respond immediately to comments or questions made during public participation. Questions may be referred to the Clerk for a written response or could form the basis for an agenda item at a future meeting. No binding decisions may be made by the Council on non-agenda matters raised by the public during the meeting.

4.3 Any person addressing the meeting shall do so through the Chair of the meeting and, in particular, shall not engage in debate or argument with other members of the public present at the meeting.

4.4 Members of the public should not heckle or otherwise disrupt proceedings and should respect the rulings of the Chair. The Chair of any meeting has an inherent right to exclude a disorderly person as a last resort. Alternatively, if there is serious disorder the Chair may decide to adjourn the meeting for a short time to allow people to calm down.

4.5 Any person attending a meeting may not orally report or comment about the meeting as it takes place but may:

- a) film, photograph or make an audio recording of a meeting;
- b) use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear proceedings at a meeting as it takes place or later;
- c) report or comment on the proceedings in writing during or after a meeting or orally report or comment after the meeting.

4.6 Comments made during public participation will be (briefly) minuted and will not be a verbatim record. Libellous, offensive, or discriminatory comments will not be minuted. There is no requirement to minute the names of members of the public who speak but the Council will endeavour to do so, only if specifically requested to do so.