

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT ERMINGTON PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Parish Councils are small local authorities that represents the first level of local government. As it is the authority closest to the community, parish councils are invariably the first place people will go with concerns or ideas, and for this reason they are a vital part of any community.

Parish councils make all kinds of decisions on behalf of the people on issues that affect the local community, most commonly planning matters, crime prevention, improving open spaces and campaigning for and delivering better services and facilities.

A Parish Council is elected by the electorate of the area, Parish Councillors are unpaid volunteers who give their time and service freely to assist the local community.

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 Chair authorises them to do so. However, as part of its community engagement, Parish Council's may agenda time for public participation when members of the public are invited to speak.

It is not a good use of time for members of the public to complain about past events, or principal or other authority issues such as overgrown hedges, street lights, pot-holes and so forth during public participation. The best contact is the Parish Clerk about such issues. Participation is best used for issues where a decision will or could be made by the council, or for comments on items already on the agenda.

Members of the public cannot be involved in the decision-making of the Council. The Council cannot 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 councillors deliberations.

If matters raised are not on the agenda for the meeting these can be added to the agenda for a future meeting at the discretion of the Council. 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 Chair.

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, & financial contracts).

Written statements should be received by the Parish Clerk at least 7 days prior to the meeting, so that they can be included in the Agenda.

The Public Open Forum is an opportunity for members of the public to:

- (a) make representations,
- (b) answer questions, or
- (c) give information relating to the business to be transacted.

Any question, comment or statement must be addressed to the Chair of the meeting and not to the audience or individual Councillor's. The Chair has the right to say that any question, comment or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted.

A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require an immediate response. Neither Councillors nor the Parish Clerk should be put under pressure to respond to questions or comments made during 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 resolved or recorded in the minutes. If the issue is on the agenda then it may be discussed under the appropriate item.

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

All persons present must act respectfully towards every other person present and will not act in a manner which demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates others present. 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 of any person.

Please note that offensive or threatening behaviour 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.

Date – 1 October 2024