



Chebsey Parish Council Public Participation Policy

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

1. Public Participation in Meetings.

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

The Parish Council does, however, set out time for a public forum at each meeting when members of the public are invited to speak. This is generally early on the agenda so that Parish Councillors may take into account any views expressed when considering an issue. Public participation will be for a period of up to 15 minutes and may only be extended in exceptional circumstances, through the discretion of the Chair. Any person wishing to speak should identify themselves and notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. Members of the public, who do not indicate their wish to speak when invited to do so, will not be allowed to do so.

A maximum of 3 minutes is permitted for a member of the public to speak and only one person may speak, without interruption on any item. On occasions two people may be invited to speak if opposing views are being expressed i.e. one for and one against a particular matter. All speakers will address their points through the Chair.

The items covered during the public participation should normally already be on the agenda, but if this is not the case they may be used to form part of the agenda for a future meeting at the discretion of the Council. Neither Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made in the public forum and members of the public do not have the right to force items on to the agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes. A brief record of topics raised in the forum will be included in the minutes of the meeting, but any, offensive and discriminatory or potential libellous comments will not be included.

Answers to questions may take the form of:

- A direct oral response
- Reference to a relevant publication, when the desired information is contained in a publication.
- By written reply, when considered appropriate.

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 who wish to remain during the remainder of the meeting should do so in silence, so as to allow Councillors to properly complete their business. They 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).

2. Unacceptable Behaviour

Chebsey Parish Council acknowledges that its parishioners, Councillors and Clerk have a right to be heard, understood and respected. The process by which members of the public can contribute

to Parish Council meetings is detailed in Section 1 above. Occasionally, certain actions by parishioners can make it difficult for the Parish Council to deal with an enquiry or concern, and as such the Council details below in Section 2 the behaviour which it considers unacceptable.

2.1 Unreasonable, Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour

The Parish Council understands that people can get frustrated or angry when they feel that matters which they feel strongly, are not being dealt with as they would wish. If that frustration or anger escalates into unreasonable, disruptive, aggressive or abusive behaviour towards other public attendees, Councillors or Clerk then the Parish Council would consider that unacceptable and not to be tolerated.

Aggressive or abusive behaviour includes language, (whether verbal or written) that may cause Councillors or Clerk to feel afraid, threatened or abused, and may include threats, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness.

The Parish Council also consider inflammatory statements, remarks of a racial, sexual or discriminatory nature and unsubstantiated allegations to be abusive behaviour.

2.2 How Such aggressive or Abusive Behaviour will be managed

The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards Councillors or Clerk is likely to result in the termination of all direct contact with the abuser. Such incidents may be reported to the police and will always be reported to the police if physical violence is used or threatened.

2.2.1 Written Correspondence

Where correspondence received by the Parish Council, its Councillors or the Clerk, either in the form of letters or emails, or via social media is deemed as being defamatory, abusive or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence, then the Parish Council will inform the sender that it considers their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful, and will ask the sender to stop using such language, and to edit and resubmit their correspondence removing any offensive text.

Should this request fail to be complied with then no further response shall be forthcoming from the Parish Council.

Should any unacceptable behaviour become repetitious then the Parish Council may elect to cease all communication with the offending individual and report such abuse or harassment to the police if deemed necessary.

2.2.2 Telephone correspondence

Should Councillors or the Clerk receive telephone calls that include, at any time during the call, verbal abuse, threats of physical violence, harassment, or are of such a nature that the recipient of the call feels uncomfortable, threatened, afraid or abused, the offending individual should expect that the phone call will be terminated with immediate effect. Should the recipient of such a call wish to record the details of the abuse contained within the telephone call in subsequent correspondence, then this may trigger the process described above in the management of such correspondence, leading to cessation of all communication with the offending individual.

Policy Document Approved and Minuted

Minute number 1225

Date 24th November 2021

Signed *Margaret Ainsworth-Hickman*

Chair

Date 24th November 2021

Reviewed 5th February 2024
Minute reference 24/020