

Brasted Parish Council

**POLICY ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PARISH COUNCIL
MEETINGS**

This Policy on Public Participation was reviewed and adopted by the Council at its Meeting held on 13 May 2024.

Council Approach to Public Participation

Brasted Parish Council meets and makes its decisions in public, is committed to community engagement and therefore warmly invites members of the public, the press and the police to attend meetings and contribute within the public participation session.

A Council meeting is not a public meeting; it is a meeting held in public to conduct council business and there is no requirement in law to provide an opportunity for the public to question the council, but this council welcomes the opportunity to offer it.

Reflecting the fact that public discussion can occur on topics about which people care strongly, this protocol exists to ensure that the public participation is conducted politely and in a structured and unemotional way that comes to a conclusion within a reasonable timeframe.

Duration

The public session will last no more than 15 minutes in total unless directed otherwise by the chairman of the meeting.

A maximum of 3 minutes each is permitted for a member of the public to make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the business of the Council. If members of the public wish for a more detailed dialogue than the 3 minutes allowed on a question then they should contact the chairman or any other councillor for an individual discussion: the Parish Council Meeting is not the forum for conducting debates between councillors and members of the public.

Members of the public are recommended to make the most of the 3 minutes by preparing notes carefully. If several people want to introduce the same question, it would be helpful to get together in advance to pool your thoughts and choose the best person to speak for you all in order to make the best use of the public participation period.

Etiquette

Good manners and respect are expected during the session. 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 must be related to the facts of the matters and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to personal views on any person.

Complaints to the Council cannot be made during the public session; these should be addressed via the Council's adopted Complaints Procedure.

Format of Public Participation

A person shall raise his hand when requesting to speak (except when a person has a disability or is likely to suffer discomfort).

A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct his comments to the chairman of the meeting. Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If more than one person wants to speak, the chairman of the meeting shall direct the order of speaking.

If matters raised are not on the agenda for the meeting these can be used to form part of the agenda for a future meeting at the discretion of the council.

Written questions received in advance of the meeting are encouraged but not essential: if provided this will make it easier for an answer to be prepared. If questions are not provided in advance then members of the public should be aware that the Chairman may be unable to answer those questions and defer that topic to a future date.

Rather than bringing questions to the entire council and other members of the public attending, questions may be addressed either by contacting the Clerk during business hours or via e mail, phone or letter.

If detailed issues are raised by the public then they must be put in writing.

Response

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 the right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes.

Role of Chairman

In Parish Council meetings all communication shall be through the chairman. Councillors may not address questions raised by members of the public except through and with the permission of the chairman. The chairman's decision is final on public participation.

Councillors and members of the public must respect the role of the chairman and may be asked to leave if in the opinion of the chairman they breach this protocol in a way that disrupts the orderly conduct of the meeting. The chairman may, if necessary, suspend or ultimately close the meeting if disruptive behaviour is not modified and obstructs the proceedings of a meeting.

It is at the chairman's discretion whether questions raised will be answered at the meeting or dealt with after the meeting by written or oral response to the enquirer.

The chairman has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted.

Decisions

The Parish Council cannot take a decision on any issue raised at the public session unless the issue is specified on the agenda of the meeting or the Clerk has delegated powers to deal with it as urgent (eg highway repairs).

Minutes

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.

Formal Council Meeting

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 chairman.

Members of the public may be excluded by a resolution of the meeting for specific items which need to be discussed in confidence.