**Scrayingham Parish Council**

**Public Participation Policy**

**Public Participation at Parish Council Meetings**

The following may offer some guidance to members of the public on how a Council meeting works and when members of the public can participate. The guidance is based on that provided by the National Association of Local Councils and is similar to that provided by Parish Councils nationwide.

**The role of the Parish Council**

Parish councils are a local authority that makes all kinds of decisions on issues that affect the local community – most commonly planning matters, crime prevention, managing open spaces and working to deliver better services. Parish Councillors are unpaid volunteers who give their time and service freely to assist the local community. Scrayingham Parish Council is made up of 7 Councillors, one of whom is elected as Chairperson. Scrayingham Parish Council Clerk duties are currently being performed by the Chairperson, free of charge (Reviewed 6 monthly).

Meetings of the Parish Council (PC) 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 PC Chairperson authorises them to do so. However, as part of its community engagement, Scrayingham Parish Council sets out a time during the meeting agenda for public participation when members of the public are invited to speak.

**Are residents allowed to speak or contribute?**

A public participation session takes place following a temporary adjournment of the meeting. It 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.

Such sessions form part of the PC meeting in law and shall be duly minuted.

**Procedure for a member of the public to speak at Parish Council meetings**

Members of the PC are always willing to discuss topics put forward by the public. The following points are intended to help make the best use of the public participation session.

* If at all possible please make a call or send an email prior to the meeting to the Clerk to let them know you wish to speak or raise an issue at a forthcoming PC meeting. This is because the Clerk can bring along to the meeting, or research before the meeting, information which may help Councillors with the query.
* Our agenda is prepared about a week before each council meeting so you will need to inform the Clerk about 10 days prior to the date of the meeting. Although this might seem a long time in advance, the PC is required by law to publicise its agenda at least 3 clear days before each meeting. (The date for the next meeting is given at the end of the Minutes of the previous meeting which can be found on the Westow PC website and are also posted on the Westow village noticeboard.)
* When the meeting reaches the agenda item of ‘public participation’, the Chairperson will suspend the meeting and members of the public will be allowed to speak. At this point Parish Councillors should not interrupt or debate issues with the public, but sometimes, if it is counter-productive not to, they may respond.
* The time for the public participation session is limited to 10 minutes. Please study the agenda carefully so that when the opportunity arises you can make the best use of your time. 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. Ideally someone should try and speak for no more than 3 minutes especially if there are others waiting to speak.
* The Chairperson has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted.
* Neither Parish Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made during the public participation session. Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto the agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes.
* When all the members of the public who wish to speak have done so the Chairperson will resume the PC meeting. A decision binding in law (this is particularly relevant to financial decisions) cannot be made unless a specific item is included on the agenda. Thus, after the public participation session the PC will consider the   items raised and decide:

a) if the issue raised is on the current meeting agenda then it will be discussed under the appropriate item

b) if it is a matter which can be referred by the Clerk to another authority, or;

c) if the item is not on the agenda, and may need a PC decision or expenditure, it would need to go onto a   future agenda.

* After the public participation session, members of the public are welcome to stay for the remainder of the PC meeting as observers, but will not be able to join in discussion unless invited to do so by the Chairperson.

**What about ‘bad behaviour’ at a Parish Council meeting**

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 matter and not personal in nature. Members of the public disturbing a PC meeting will be asked by the Chairperson to desist in any behaviour considered to be disrupting the meeting. If the behaviour continues the PC can resolve, without discussion, that the person(s) withdraw from the meeting.

Document reviewed on 21/01/24