

SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME GUIDANCE

Guidance Notes in Relation to Speaking at Council Meetings



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1. About Public Question Time

To encourage the involvement of the people of Southwater in the business of the Parish Council, the Council has arranged a public question time at all meetings of the Council which are open to the public. The procedures outlined in this guidance document apply subject to conformity with the rules laid out in the Council's adopted Standing Orders.

2. Meetings

Meetings shall be open to the public* unless their presence is 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 of a meeting shall be by a resolution which shall give reasons for the public's exclusion.

**Note: councillors not appointed to the committee / subcommittee have no more rights than the public and are also excluded.*

3. Speaking at Meetings

- i. 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.
- ii. To clarify, members of the public may only speak in relation to a specific agenda item and the business to be transacted for that meeting.
- iii. Written questions may be sent in advance of the meeting subject to the acceptance of the Chairman of the meeting.
- iv. Questions at a committee/subcommittee meeting must be within the remit of the Committee.
- v. A person shall be seated at the appropriate position directed by the Chairman when requesting to speak and when speaking (except when a person has a disability or is likely to suffer discomfort).
- vi. A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct their comments to the Chairman of the meeting.
- vii. 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 a

group of people want to speak, they may appoint one representative to speak on their behalf.

- viii. If a member of the public wants to ask questions or raise matters not relating to the business on the agenda then the resident should contact the Parish Office directly or attend a Councillor Surgery (first Saturday of the month, except August).

4. The Chairman of a Meeting

The Chairman may reject a question if it:

- i. Is not about a matter for which the Council has a responsibility, or which affects the area.
- ii. Is defamatory, frivolous, or offensive.
- iii. Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.
- iv. Does not directly relate to an agenda item and the business to be transacted.

5. Time Period for Speaking

- i. The period designated for public participation at a meeting shall not exceed fifteen (15) minutes unless directed by the Chairman of the meeting in accordance with Standing Orders.
- ii. A member of the public is entitled to speak once only on the same issue (agenda item) and shall not speak for more than 3 minutes.
- iii. Where several people wish to speak on the same issue, the Chairman may direct that a single representative to be appointed.
- iv. A question shall not require a response at the meeting nor start a debate on the question. The Chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given.

If you have any questions in relation to the public question time at council meetings, please contact the Executive Officer via enquiry@southwater-pc.gov.uk