

Public participation at parish council meetings

All members of the public and press are welcome to attend meetings of Forncett Parish Council and have a legal right to do so under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. Although there is no statutory right for members of the public to speak at these meetings, Forncett Parish Council is committed to community engagement, and as such residents are warmly invited to attend and contribute during the public participation item.

From time to time, confidential items may be discussed, in which case the press and members of the public are excluded in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

The Parish Council meeting is not a public meeting, but a meeting conducted in public. The public are asked to respect the fact that this is a meeting to conduct Council business and interruptions during Council business are unhelpful.

Purposeful Public participation is an opportunity for members of the public to:

- (a) Make representations
- (b) Ask questions; or
- (c) Give evidence relating to the business to be transacted.

Questions should ideally be submitted to the Parish Clerk by email ten working days prior to the Council meeting. This is to allow sufficient time for an item to be included on the agenda (if appropriate) and the research and preparation of an appropriate response.

The agenda is the official order of business for Parish Council meetings. The agenda will indicate when the public participation will take place. This will be early on in the agenda so that Parish Councillors may take into account any views expressed when reaching their decisions. The public participation agenda item will be for a maximum period of thirty minutes. In the event of several members of the public wishing to speak, each contribution will be limited to a maximum of three minutes. If members of the public present wish to comment on a specific item on the agenda, the Chairman will invite comments at the time of that agenda item (the same time restrictions will apply). Further supplementary comments or questions are solely at the discretion of the Council Chair.

The Chairman has the right to deem a question or statement as inappropriate and will not be accepted. A person who speaks at a meeting shall direct their comments to the Chairman of the meeting. Only one person is permitted to speak at a time. If a supplementary question is not able to be answered at the meeting, a written reply will be sent to the questioner as early as possible after the meeting, but in any case, within 14 days of the meeting whenever possible.

Neither Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made under public participation. A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require a response at the meeting. The chairman of the meeting may direct that a written or oral response be given. Members of the public are therefore requested to leave their contact details with the Clerk before leaving the Council meeting if they wish to receive a reply to their query. Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes. If the issue is on the agenda, then it will be discussed under the appropriate item. Members of the public should not speak during the debate by the Council.

The Chairman may decide to adjourn the meeting where Councillors express a wish to seek additional clarification from members of the public. All persons present are expected to act respectfully and will not act in a manner that demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates. All statements, questions and responses, challenges to statements, complaints or criticisms should be made politely. All statements, questions and responses must be factual and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to personal views against an individual. Offensive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. If a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of a meeting, the Council reserves the right to curtail the contribution of that person and exclude them from the meeting. In the event of serious disorder, the Chairman has the right to adjourn the meeting for a short time to allow order to be restored.

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