

Piddle Valley Parish Council Code of Conduct for

Public Participation at Parish Council Meetings

Members of the public have a legal right to attend the monthly Parish Council Meetings of Piddle Valley Parish Council (PVPC) as well as any extra ordinary meetings. Members of the public may be excluded (by a resolution of the meeting) for specific items which need to be discussed in confidence, for example, but not limited to, staffing matters, financial details relating to individuals or tenders for contracts.

Members of the public have no legal right to speak at meetings of the Council. However PVPC, as part of its community engagement, sets aside time for public participation at meetings.

1. Questions or comments from members of the public appear as an agenda item called 'Democratic Period' for all Parish Council meetings. The item appears at the beginning of each meeting, and has a 30 minute period if required. In the event of several people wishing to speak either in favour or against the issue, the respective group(s) can be requested to select one spokesperson to address the Council. One person wishing to speak either in support or against the issue will be allowed to address the Council even if no other person wishes to present an opposing argument. Anyone speaking will be asked to limit their presentation to 3 minutes.

2. Question(s) will be answered by the relevant Councillor, the Chairperson or the Clerk. If the question is not able to be answered at the meeting, an agreed method of response will be stated and sent as soon as it can be following the meeting, depending on the detail required.

3. Councillors with a prejudicial interest in a subject raised within the democratic period should declare an interest but will be allowed to speak during the democratic period.

4. Public participation is best used for issues where a decision will or could be made by the Council at the meeting for items already on the agenda. Questions should ideally be submitted to the Clerk at least three working days prior to the respective meeting. This is to allow sufficient time for research and preparation of an appropriate response. Questions should be submitted in writing, by e-mail or post to Piddle Valley Parish Council, 3 Ash Hill, Stratton, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 9RS, for the respective meeting. It is important to note that the council is unable to make a decision binding in law unless a specific item has been included on the agenda.

5. It is undesirable to allow members of the public to speak throughout the meeting as this runs the risk of confusing the roles of Councillors, who participate in the meeting, and members of the public who observe. Members of the public will not be allowed to speak during the debate by the Council of items on the agenda. However, the Chairperson may seek additional clarification from members of the public during the debate.

6. Comments made during public participation will be briefly minuted and will not necessarily be a verbatim record. Due to GDPR no names of members of the public who speak will be minuted.

7. Remarks of a libellous, offensive, discriminatory or otherwise unlawful nature will not be minuted because PVPC is liable for what is in its minutes even if someone else said it. Anybody making such remarks will be asked to desist and to leave if they persist.

8. Neither Councillors, nor the Clerk, should feel required to respond immediately to comments made during public participation other than those which relate to items on the agenda. A comment could be referred to the Clerk to include as an agenda item for a future meeting. Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto Parish Council meeting agendas.

9. Members of the public should not heckle or otherwise disrupt proceedings and should respect the rulings of the Chair. The Chairperson of any meeting has an inherent right to exclude a disorderly person. Members of the public have a legal right to be present so excluding one or more of them will be a last resort. Alternatively if there is serious disorder the Chairperson may decide to adjourn the meeting for a short time to allow people to calm down.