**Public Participation at Stogursey Parish Council Meetings**

1. **The role of the Parish Council**
	1. Parish Councils are a local authority that makes all kinds of decisions on behalf of the people on issues that affect the local community, most commonly planning matters, managing open spaces and campaigning for and delivering better services and facilities.
	2. A Parish Council is elected by the electorate of the area to serve as a body to decide upon and provide local facilities and fulfil requirements. Parish Councillors are unpaid volunteers who give their time and service freely to assist the local community. Stogursey Parish Council is made up of 10 Councillor Seats, managed by a Chairman, supported by a part time Parish Clerk (14 hours per week).
2. **Are residents allowed to speak or contribute?**
	1. Meetings of the Parish Council are not public meetings - they are meetings conducted in public. Members of the public have a statutory right to attend meetings of the council as observers. The law does not allow members of the public to take part in the debates and they have no legal right to speak unless the Parish Council Chairman authorises them to do so. There is no legal requirement to provide a public forum, however, as part of its community engagement, Stogursey Parish Council sets out a time for public participation at an agreed time when members of the public are invited to speak.
	2. Public participation 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. Residents should study the agenda carefully so that when the opportunity occurs they can make the best use of the allocated time.
	3. Residents who wish to raise a point, which does not relate to an item on that evening’s agenda, are free to do so during public participation.  However, the council’s discussion of the point may be delayed until a subsequent meeting, as the council is unable to make a decision binding ‘in law’ (this is particularly relevant to financial decisions) unless a specific item is included on the agenda.
3. **Procedure for a member of the public to speak or raise issues at Council meetings**
	1. Residents should if possible contact the Clerk to inform her of the wish to speak or raise an issue at a forthcoming Council meeting.  There may be information the Clerk can bring along to the meeting or research before the meeting which may help with the query.
	2. Members of the council are always willing to discuss topics put forward by the public. The Agenda is prepared about a week before the next council meeting so the Clerk will need to be informed about 10 days prior to the meeting.  The council is required by law to publicise its agenda at least three clear days before each meeting and only business contained within the agenda can be considered at the meeting.
	3. During the ‘Public Forum’ members of the public will be allowed to speak for 3-5 minutes each. At this point Councillors should not interrupt or debate issues with the public, but if it is counter-productive not to, they may respond, but debate or long discussions should not take place between the public and the Council, as this is the ‘public’ section.
	4. The overall time for the public to speak is limited to 15 minutes. 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.
	5. A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require a response and there should be no debate or discussion between the Council and the public. The Chairman has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted.
	6. 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 a right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the 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.
	7. When all the members of the public have spoken in the public forum, the Chairman will start the meeting.  At this point the Council may discuss the item(s) raised by the public, and consider:
		1. if it is a matter the Parish Council can legally consider and make any decisions on;
		2. if it is a matter which can be referred by the Clerk to another authority, or;
		3. it is an item which will need a Council decision or expenditure and so would need to go onto a future agenda. The item will then be referred to a future agenda.

If the issue is on the agenda then it will be discussed under the appropriate item. 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.

*No legal decisions or expenditure can be made on any item raised at a meeting (by public or Councillor) because the item would not have been legally notified on an agenda in advance to the electorate or the Council.*

* 1. 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 (e.g. staffing matters, tenders for contracts, some legal issues).
1. **Behaviour’ at a Council meeting**
	1. 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, challenges to statements, complaints or criticisms must be related to the facts of the matter and not personal in nature.
	2. Members of the public disturbing a Council meeting will be asked by the Chairperson to desist in any behaviour considered to be disrupting the meeting. If the behaviour continues Council can resolve, without discussion, that the person(s) withdraw from the meeting, or be removed.
	3. If a meeting becomes unmanageable because of interruption, or impossible to be continued due to disturbance or disregard for the Chairpersons instructions the Council can and will resolve to either close the meeting for a period of time or have the meeting recalled for another date