

## **Policy, Finance & Performance Management Committee – 13<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

### **Agenda Item 7)**

#### **Public Participation Time – Consideration of options for future meetings**

At the Council Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019 consideration was given as to how the Town Council might review its current policy and practice in respect of managing public participation time.

The existing rules and regulations are set out in section 2 of the Council's Standing Orders, which were adopted in April 2015. These were taken from the Model Standing Orders provided by the National Association of Local Councils and are set out in Appendix A, overleaf.

Prior to 2015, the Council permitted any member of the public to raise an issue of their choosing, provided it had some relevance to Swanage. The District Council and many other parish councils still adopt this approach. However, practice does vary widely, from some Councils requiring the registration of questions prior to meetings, through to a completely open door.

If Members wish to adopt a more open approach, these are a number of the potential options:

- To retain the existing Standing Orders, but as they are not established in statute the Chairman of the meeting can waive them at his or her discretion. However, the Chairman would need to ensure that they are not deployed in a way that could be construed as discriminatory against any one group or individual.
- To retain the existing Standing Orders, but where contributions in respect of agenda items finish prior to the 15 minute limit for public participation time, the chairman could allow other questions to be raised.
- Revise the existing Standing Orders, for example to permit a wider range of subjects to be raised, but to stipulate that matters cannot be repeated from meeting to meeting.
- Replace the existing Standing Orders, adopting revised wording enabling any subject relevant to Swanage to be raised without restriction.

At the Council Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> January this matter was referred to this committee for detailed consideration. Some preference was expressed for the third bullet point above, and potential amendments to Standing Orders are set out in Appendix B.

#### **Decision required**

To consider the draft wording of a revised Standing Order, and to make a recommendation to full Council accordingly.

Martin Ayres  
Town Clerk

February 2019

## 2. Public Participation Time

- a. Each Council Meeting shall be preceded by a period of Public Participation Time during which members of the public may make representations, ask questions and give evidence in respect of the business on the agenda.
- b. The period of time designated for public participation in accordance with Standing Order 2(a) above shall not exceed 15 minutes unless directed by the Chairman of the meeting.
- c. Subject to Standing Order 2(b) above, a member of the public shall not speak for more than 3 minutes.
- d. In accordance with Standing Order 2(a) above, 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.
- e. A person shall raise his hand when requesting to speak and stand when speaking (except when a person has a disability or is likely to suffer discomfort). The Chairman of the meeting may at any time permit a person to be seated when speaking.
- f. A person who speaks in Public Participation Time shall direct his comments to the Chairman of the meeting.
- g. 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.
- h. No person shall behave offensively or improperly. If this Standing Order is ignored, the Chairman of the meeting shall request such person(s) to moderate or improve their conduct.
- i. If person(s) disregard the request of the Chairman of the meeting to moderate or improve their conduct, the Chairman may request that the person be no longer heard or excluded from the meeting room.
- j. If a request by the Chairman under Standing Order 2(i) above is ignored, the Chairman may take further reasonable steps to restore order or to progress the meeting. This may include temporarily suspending or closing the public participation session.

**Draft Amendments/Additions to Standing Order 2.**

2.a to be re-worded as follows:

Each Council Meeting shall be preceded by a period of Public Participation Time during which members of the public may make representations, ask questions and give evidence. Matters must relate to one of the following categories, and those wishing to speak will be called in the following order:

- business on the agenda of the meeting;
- matters where the Town Council has powers or duties;
- other matters which directly affect the parish of Swanage.

Add the following as a new paragraph:

The Chairman will not allow any participation which is of a personal nature or relates to individual issues, nor in respect of complaints which must be dealt with through the Council's adopted Complaints Procedure.

The Chairman will not allow a question to be repeated at future meetings of the Town Council, or its Committees, until such time as there has been a material change in circumstances in relation to the issue raised. Nor will evidence be allowed to be re-stated or any other form of representation be made on a recurrent basis.

2.g. to be amended to include the following:

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. Where more than one person wishes to speak on the same issue the Chairman will expect participants not to repeat comments made by earlier speakers. The Chairman may also ask for a single representative to speak on behalf of those with similar concerns.