

Holywell Town Council

Public Session on Agenda – Meetings of the Full Council

Protocol and Rules of Engagement

Introduction

Holywell Town Council meets and makes its decisions in public and is committed to community engagement and therefore would like to encourage members of the public to attend and contribute to meetings. However, a council meeting is not a public meeting; it is a meeting held in public and there is no requirement in law to provide an opportunity for the public to question the council, but this council welcomes the opportunity to engage the public in consultation. **This protocol does not replace normal contact with councillors, which should be encouraged in the first instance.**

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. Meetings normally take place at 6pm on the third Tuesday of every month excluding the August recess period.

General Principles

- **The speaker should be over 16 and a resident in the four wards of the Holywell community. The Clerk will check the name and address in the electoral register to confirm this is the case before accepting the request (or in the case of a speaker under 18 the address of the parents). A speaker not residing in the four wards of the Holywell community may be allowed to speak on a matter of local concern at the Chairman's discretion.**
- The time limit for the public session agenda item should be 15 minutes.
- The time limit for each separate speaker should be 5 minutes, therefore a maximum of 3 speakers per meeting.
- If there are more than 3 requests per month the speakers will be allocated on a first come first served basis, with any remaining requests rolling over to the following month's meeting.
- Notice should be given to the Clerk at least 7 days before a meeting takes place, to enable sufficient notification to be given to members and inclusion on the meeting's agenda.
- The Clerk will require written notification from the speaker outlining the nature and details of the matter. This should normally be by letter or email and specify the name, address and telephone number of the speaker.
- If members are unable to give an immediate answer, and the matter may need to be investigated or discussed at a further meeting of the council, the speaker will be advised that the Clerk will contact them in due course to confirm the outcome.
- The Support Officer will publicise the public session on social media, noticeboards and the council's website.

Electors Rights and Responsibilities

- The right to speak is available to any elector whose name appears on the current Register of Electors.
- Electors may speak on any topic or issue that has a bearing on the life of any one or more inhabitants of the Holywell community, regardless of the Council's power to act upon the topic or issue addressed.
- Electors may speak extempore or read from a prepared speech, according to their wishes.
- Electors may, at their own expense, prepare and distribute to Councillors background papers regarding the topic of their choice, but may not use any other audio-visual aids.
- Electors may not use intemperate or foul language.
- Electors may not make insulting or offensive remarks to, or about, any person or identifiable groups or persons.
- Electors shall, on request, be entitled to know in general terms, whether the Town Council has the power to act upon the topic or issue, which has or will be addressed.
- Any person speaking at a meeting shall address his comments to the Chairman only and not individual Councillors.

The Clerk

- Shall ensure that a record is kept of the date and time of each elector's notification of the desire to exercise the right to speak as follows: i) For notifications delivered in person the date and time of receipt. ii) For notifications received by mail, or by any other means, the date and time that the notification was first identified.
- Will provide the person(s) exercising their right to speak with a copy of this protocol and written confirmation that they are expected at the next Town Council meeting.
- Shall present the list of public speakers to the person chairing the meeting.
- Will include in the minutes a record of the public participation session and the actions agreed therein.
- Will respond or instigate further actions as directed by the Council.
- If more than one member of the public wishes to speak about the same matter the Clerk may request that a spokesperson is nominated to address the matter on behalf of the individuals.

The Chairman

- Shall ensure that electors entitled to speak are heard in the correct order.
- Shall ensure that the electors are heard politely and without interruption.
- Shall ensure that the guidelines on abusive and offensive remarks and foul or intemperate language are observed by the electorate.

Outcomes and Feedback

- Members of the public should note that the council is only allowed to take decisions committing the council on topics that are publicised on the agenda.
- The Chairman may direct that a response to a question posed by a member of the public be referred to a Councillor or to the Clerk for an oral or written response following the meeting.

- The Chairman may decide to carry the matter forward on a future agenda depending on whether the questions needs further investigation by the Clerk on behalf of the Council.
- The Chairman or Individual Councillors may propose that a topic or issue addressed by an elector be placed on the next agenda of the Full Council meeting or be referred to a committee/sub-committee of the Town Council.
- The speaker may receive a verbal response at the time of the meeting from the Chairman of what action the Town Council can and will take on the matter. The Clerk will then confirm this response in writing to the speaker.

This document was approved by Holywell Town Council on 21st May 2019.