

Meetings – A Best Practice Check List

It's important to make sure that everything the parish council does is communicated effectively to residents and all decisions are taken openly – many complaints we receive are due to a lack of understanding of how a parish council operates and the respective roles of councillors and clerk.

-  Public venue booked – although it's convenient to have the meeting around your dining room table, having the meeting in a private residence creates the impression that decisions are being taken behind closed doors, even if the public is welcome to attend.
-  Agendas and full reports for Parish Council and any committee meetings made available to the public a minimum of **three full working days** before the meeting (remember to exclude the date you publish the notice, weekends, bank holidays and the meeting date when calculating.)
-  Agendas clearly state when and where the meeting will take place and any special arrangements, e.g., please turn off your mobile phone, additional parking available at the pub, public speaking from 7.00-7.30, refreshments will be available (always important!).
-  If you have public speaking at your meetings, make clear how much time will be set aside – in total and for each speaker – and any protocols to be followed: this can help avoid public speaking time being dominated by one person. Don't forget to make it clear that, after public speaking time has ended, further opportunities for public participation will happen only at the discretion of the Chairman.
-  Agendas include an item for declaration of interests, and all declared interests are recorded in the minutes – don't forget to note any dispensations received from the Standards Committee.
-  Agendas indicate which items will be discussed in private session and the reason(s) that the public will be asked to leave the meeting.
-  Agendas **do not** include "Any Other Business" (or an item to this effect) – it's not fair to the public to introduce new business once the meeting has already started, as the point of publishing the agenda in advance is to give councillors time to consider the matters on it, and the public the opportunity to decide whether or not to attend. If councillors want to talk about anything and everything, close the meeting first; otherwise, include "Items for Next Meeting" so everyone knows what will be discussed and when.
-  Minutes are precise and accurate, containing all the points raised which were relevant to the decisions taken, including decisions made in private session (these must be written carefully so as not to disclose exempt information but still make clear how a decision was reached).
-  Draft minutes available publicly no later than **ten working days** after the meeting (again, discount the date of the meeting and the date of minutes publication) – with a clear indication that they are draft and subject to approval at the next meeting.
-  Village notice board and website kept up-to-date with latest information so everyone knows who their councillors are and how to contact them, and how to contact the clerk.
-  Parish council standing orders, policies and protocols available for public inspection – perhaps having a list of the titles available on your village notice board and details of how to access them, and the full documents on the parish website.