

Kirtlington Parish Council

Policy on public participation at meetings

1. Arnold Baker (13th Ed, para 7.7) states as follows:

Public participation

7.7. Many local councils set aside a set period before or after the formal meeting, or adjourn the formal meeting at a set time to enable members of the public present to ask questions or make statements. It is however important that such a session does not become a debate with the council or individual councillors and that members of the public do not intervene in the meeting or at any other time. Many local councils give written guidance to members of the public when they attend in order to avoid misunderstanding as to the purpose of the meeting and the session. It can therefore be necessary for the chairman of the meeting to exercise firm control if there is a contentious local issue.

Guidelines

2. The primary purpose of a KPC meeting is for the KPC councillors to discuss and reach decisions on matters properly before them.
3. Meetings of the KPC are in public, but are not public meetings. Members of the public have a statutory right to attend meetings of the Council as observers, except where they are excluded (by a resolution of the meeting) for specific items which need to be discussed in confidence, for example, staffing matters or tenders for contracts.
4. KPC meetings are therefore not, and are not intended to be, for the purposes of members of the public debating matters with each other, and/or with members of KPC. There are a number of reasons for this, including (amongst others).
 - a. First, that is the purpose of KPC meetings;
 - b. Second, it is necessary and desirable as a matter of efficient decision making;
 - c. Third, uncontrolled debate risks matters arising and potentially being decided upon which are not formally before KPC at that meeting, and/or being taken without full proper consideration and reflection upon all relevant facts and viewpoints.

5. That said, at KPC meetings KPC may if appropriate and practicable be able to consider and respond to questions from the public submitted in writing in respect of a particular agenda item where such questions are received at least three clear working days in advance of the relevant meeting. Such questions should be concise, to the point, and save in exceptional circumstances limited to one question per person (see also 8 below). If it is not appropriate or practical to respond to any such question at the KPC meeting, then they may be considered in the normal way (c.f. 9 below).
6. In general questions volunteered in respect of agenda items without written notice as above cannot be addressed at KPC meetings, save by exceptional permission on the day and where the questions are brief, can be addressed then and there, and are not disruptive to the proceedings.
7. Furthermore, in the discretion of the Chair, questions from the public may be allowed under the AoB agenda item, it being noted however that it will often not be possible or appropriate to answer such questions then and there, and/or that it will usually be appropriate and lead to better decision making for the member of the public to be invited instead to submit the question in writing as set out in '9' below so that it can be properly considered.
8. If more than one member of the public wishes to ask questions on the same or related topics under '5' – '7' above, they should nominate one person to do so on their behalf. This will avoid duplication and make the best use of the time available for public participation. All questions should be no more than 3 minutes in length.
9. In considering the above, it is important to note that members of the public are able to submit queries to KPC in writing on issues of concern, which allows KPC to consider and respond to them as appropriate after proper consideration.
10. It is particularly important that any questions or comments from the public are put respectfully and politely, and directed to the Chair. No personal attacks, harassment or bullying will be tolerated.
11. The Chair has the power to eject members of the public causing disruption at meetings. Whilst it is anticipated that this power should need to be used very rarely, it remains extant and available for use if necessary.

Adopted 11th January 2024