

Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council

Attendance at Meetings

Purpose

This policy is designed to set out the requirements and arrangements for attendance of a meeting of Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council.

It provides guidance to all attendees of Parish Council meetings to ensure they are held in an orderly, dignified and effective manner.

It will also ensure all members of the public and press have equal opportunity to have their voices heard while maintaining orderly conduct and preventing disruption of the meeting.

Scope

This policy is separated into two sections, one relating to the public participation period, known as the Public Forum.

Members of the public and press have a statutory right to attend meetings to observe, and may only take part in the public forum section of the meeting. Members of the public and press must abide by this guide at all times. If someone is determined to be in breach of these guidelines, the Parish Council reserve the right to curtail their contribution and ask them to leave the meeting or refuse participation if deemed they will cause disruption or offence at future meetings.

The second section relates to the conduct of participants, including the public, press, Councillors, staff members and any other person or persons in attendance.

This policy applies equally to virtual and physical meetings.

Public Forum

The Public Forum 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. Members of the public or press are invited to do so by following the guidelines below to ensure the meeting continues to operate smoothly.

- All those wishing to speak should make themselves known to the Clerk no later than midday on the day prior to the meeting. This is to enable the Parish Council to ensure all business can be conducted and allow sufficient time for the Clerk to inform them of any limits.
- Should there be a need, the Parish Council reserve the right to limit speakers to a 3 minute time limit. This decision will be based on the number of people wishing to speak and the amount of business remaining on the agenda. If any restrictions are deemed necessary, this will be communicated to all those who have expressed a wish to speak by 5pm the day before the meeting.
- Members of the public will be asked to speak in the order the Clerk received their notification.

- The Parish Council ask that only one person speaks on a given topic to avoid duplication and make best use of the public forum period. For this reason, the Parish Council request a copy of the statement being made or a summary of the topic to be communicated to them.
- All statements, questions and responses must be related to the facts of the matter and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to personal views on any individual person.
- 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.
- Equally, questions raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session, even with prior notification, do not require a response as to do so may result in inaccurate or confidential information being shared.
- The Chairman reserves the right to identify any contribution that violates these guidelines and refuse to accept it.
- The public forum section of the meeting will be limited to a maximum of 15 minutes.

Conduct

A Parish Council meeting is a statutory requirement of local government and all those attending should conduct themselves appropriately. Courtesy, decorum and dignity must be at the forefront of all attendees, including Councillors, staff members, volunteers, members of the public and press, and any other persons who may be in attendance.

1. Members

Councillors will conduct themselves professionally at all times. Each Councillor's contribution is as valuable as another is and they will not be spoken over. Decisions made at a Council meeting should be collaborative with votes taken in accordance with Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Standing Order 2 (r). The function of the Chair is to ensure the meeting runs smoothly and all business is conducted effectively. Councillors remain bound by the Code of Conduct at all times.

2. Public & Press

The public and press are invited to attend meetings to observe, but their participation is limited to the Public Forum. At all physical meetings there will be a designated seating area and attendees must not stray from this area. When attending a virtual meeting, all people listening or watching should be made known to the Clerk for accurate reporting.

Any attendee who contributes to the Public Forum will only do so in accordance with the above guidelines. Failure to do so may result in future contributions being denied, ensuring effective time management during Council meetings.

All members of the public and press may be asked to leave if any item on the agenda contains, or is likely to contain, confidential information. This requirement will be noted on the agenda in advance of the meeting.

No attendee will be permitted to interrupt, disturb or distract any Council member from the business of the meeting. This includes, but is not limited to, the waving of paper, speech, whispers, hand gestures, laughter or any other vocalisation that may constitute a distraction and thus disruption of the Council business.

Ixworth and Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council has a firm zero tolerance policy towards violence and aggression as is expected throughout public services. No member of staff, Councillors, public or press should be subjected to violent, threatening and abusive behaviour of any degree and the Council reserves its right to enforce this policy as required to safeguard the welfare of all participants and ensure the smooth running and orderly conduct of our meetings.

Ixworth & Ixworth Thorpe Parish Council reserve the right in common law to exclude people whose disorderly conduct or other misbehavior disrupts (or threatens to disrupt) the business of the meeting and that the power can be used either in advance of the meeting or at the meeting itself.