West Mersea Town Council

Adopted: 7 December 2023
Reviewed: 13 August 2026
Next Review: August 2027

MEETING PROTOCOL

Public Questions, Comments or Representations

The public has a statutory right to attend Town Council meetings and to observe. It is a courtesy extended by local councils to have a section on the agenda where the public is invited to submit questions at a specified period during the Council meeting.

The Mayor has a duty to run an orderly meeting. He/she may take any reasonable steps to ensure compliance.

This Town Council has arrangements for hearing members of the public at a Public Open Forum section at council meetings. As per the Town Council's Standing Orders fifteen (15) minutes in total is allocated for this section of the agenda; three (3) minutes for each member of public to speak. The following protocol for the Public Open Forum will be followed:

1. Matters to be raised must relate particularly to the business of the Council and be a matter for which the Council has responsibility or relate to the wellbeing of West Mersea.

2. The Chair will formally acknowledge the matter raised and decide in which order matters will be heard. Priority is given to items on the agenda.

3. The Chair may reject a question if it is defamatory, frivolous or abusive.
   Questions that are substantially the same as a matter raised in the previous six (6) months or requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information may also be rejected.

4. Councillors should not respond to matters raised in the open forum unless asked to do so by the Chair e.g., in the case of a simple question asked requiring a simple answer. However, there should not be any discussion of matters raised. If matters raised are comments on agenda items, these will have been heard and can be taken into account when that point on the agenda is reached. If they are new business for Council's consideration, they are also un-notified business, and will be discussed on a future agenda (if relevant)."

5. All those present will act respectfully and not in a manner that demeans, insults, threatens or intimidates others. Offensive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. The Chair reserves the right to curtail the contribution of and seek to exclude anyone acting in this manner in accordance with the Standing Orders (Section 2).

   a. No person shall obstruct the transaction of business at a meeting or behave offensively or improperly. If this standing order is ignored, the Chair of the meeting shall request such person(s) to moderate or improve their conduct.

b. If person(s) disregard the request of the Chair of the meeting to moderate or improve their conduct, any Councillor or the Chair of the meeting may move that the person be no longer heard or be excluded from the meeting. The motion, if seconded, shall be put to the vote without discussion.

c. If a resolution made under standing order 2(b) is ignored, the Chair of the meeting may take further reasonable steps to restore order or to progress the meeting. This may include temporarily suspending or closing the meeting.

6. In accordance with the Standing Orders, 'a person who attends a meeting is permitted to report on the meeting whilst the meeting is open to the public. To "report" means to film, photograph, make an audio recording of meeting proceedings, use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear the meeting as it takes place or later or to report or to provide oral or written commentary about the meeting so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later to persons not present'. For the information of those attending, the Chair will acknowledge that the meeting may be recorded.

7. The minutes of the meeting are not a verbatim record of the meeting. In accordance with the Standing Orders: The minutes of a meeting shall include an accurate record of the following:

   i. the time and place of the meeting;
   ii. the names of councillors who are present and the names of councillors who are absent;
   iii. interests that have been declared by councillors and non-councillors with voting rights;
   iv. the grant of dispensations (if any) to councillors and non-councillors with voting rights;
   v. whether a councillor or non-councillor with voting rights left the meeting when matters that they held interests in were being considered;
   vi. if there was a public participation session; and
   vii. the resolutions made

   The accuracy of draft minutes, including any amendment(s) made to them, shall be confirmed by resolution of the Council and shall be signed by the chairman of the meeting.