

MISTERTON PARISH COUNCIL

CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

Misterton Parish Council was awarded Quality status in 2006. This demonstrates excellence in:

- representing and actively involving all parts of the community
- being effectively and properly managed, with members and the Clerk upholding a high standard of conduct
- working closely with voluntary and community sector groups, and articulating the community's needs and wishes through effective communications.

In order to improve involvement of electors in Parish Council business, the public discussion period was extended from 10 to 15 minutes and scheduled at the end of the meeting to give those attending the opportunity to comment on the business of the meeting.

It has become apparent over recent months that a number of those who attend regularly do not use the public discussion period to give their views on issues that affect the community. Instead they often use this valuable time to pick over past minutes (that the Council has already approved).

The following steps are proposed to enable the Council to focus on the issues that are affecting this community so that councillors have the opportunity to hear the views of residents on them.

Role of the Chairman

The role of the Chairman is to ensure meetings are well managed, business is covered, and decisions agreed. The role of the Chairman in procedural matters will be more rigorously applied.

All contributions by councillors to debate throughout the course of the meeting should be addressed to the Chairman.

The Clerk's views and guidance will be sought by the Chairman.

Similarly, any questions from the public should be addressed to the Chairman.

It is the decision of the Chairman whether contributions by councillors, and comments and questions from the public, be allowed.

Code of Conduct for those attending the meeting

A Code of Conduct for those attending meetings of the Parish Council will be agreed by members.

Public discussion

The period of Public Discussion was extended from 10 to 15 minutes, and moved from the beginning to towards the end of the meeting, at the request of members of the public in order to enable them to contribute to the business of the meeting.

The purpose of Public Discussion is to raise genuine points of public interest, including raising concerns, asking questions and making suggestions. The constructive views of residents and ideas for improvement that will benefit the whole community are sought.

However, matters raised by the public do not form part of the decision-making of the Parish Council at the meeting when raised so will be recorded briefly. Any matter that requires consideration by the Parish Council will be included on the agenda for the next appropriate meeting.

Questions that relate to the *administration* of the Parish Council, including discussing the wording of minutes, should not form part of Public Discussion but should be put in writing and addressed to the Clerk at The Misterton Centre.

The Parish Council is open to criticism and ready to learn from mistakes.

The Chairman will decide whether the Parish Council will consider such correspondence in Council, or request the Clerk to respond to such criticisms and representations in writing.

Handling concerns in this way will prevent knee-jerk responses and enable the criticism to be considered more carefully, with proper investigation and considering all angles.

If such criticisms or representations are dealt with in writing, councillors will be furnished with copies of both the letter and response.

Minutes

The purpose of the minutes is to provide an accurate but necessarily abbreviated account of the business of the meeting such that readers in years to come will get a sense of the issues facing the community and the decisions taken.

The Clerk has 43 years' experience of writing minutes, and a number of qualifications in local government administration. Any subsequent appointee to this role will also be expected to have extensive experience of local government administration, including minute taking. So the Clerk's experience and expertise in this regard should be respected.

The minutes should represent a fair, unbiased and non-partisan record of the meeting.

The Clerk will send the Chairman the draft minutes upon completion for information and to assist with media relations, but not to interfere with the independence of the Clerk.

Implementation

This code will be implemented from September 2007.

Hazel Brand
Chairman