

MENHENIOT PARISH COUNCIL

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COUNCILLORS PREPARATION FOR MEETINGS AND CONDUCT AT MEETINGS

In October, after instructions from myself and Eve, the Clerk wrote to all councillors to remind them about the importance of preparing for meetings and with a request from me about the way in which we conduct ourselves in public.

I know that not everyone has read the original email, so I want to take a couple of minutes to read it out.

Before I read it, let me explain the background to this.

We are starting to attract more residents to our meetings, and the feedback that we receive from them is positive.

This trend is likely to continue, and as more people attend, we all need to be clear about what impact our decisions have, and the way we make them has on our parish.

What I am going to read out is based on The Good Councillors Guide (that you were given copies of last year), our own Code of Conduct and advice from Sarah Mason of CALC.

None of the points I'm making should be taken personally, but are given in the spirit of improving the way in which we, as councillors work together as a team to support each other.

Council public meetings are business meetings, and are held to make decisions.

1 This means that your attendance is expected at every meeting, and if you are unable to attend, you should send The chairman or the clerk your apologies in advance, together with your reason. I will send out a list of future meeting dates for you. It is helpful for me to know if you plan to be away for holidays so that I can avoid allocating enquiries or projects to you.

2 As in any other business meeting, I agree an agenda beforehand with the Clerk and Vice Chairman and it is the Clerk's job to make sure that you have all the information you need to make your decisions.

Where a topic may be complex, he will prepare a briefing note. If you need any further information or specialist advice, speak with me or him beforehand and we will get what you need. If you prefer to seek your own advice or carry out your own

research, it is vital that I know what you are doing so that I can pass the information onto the other councillors before the meeting.

Decisions should not be held up because you don't have all the information you need when there is time beforehand to get it. Everyone needs to prepare for the meeting by reading the agenda and the reports that come with it.

3 When you make your decisions at a public meeting, they must be based on the proposals on the table and the information you have to hand. This is especially important when making planning decisions.

If you believe there is something wrong with the planning application or there are other issues that may affect how you will decide, speak with the Clerk or the Chairman or myself before the meeting so that we can discuss and agree what to do about it. This may include taking advice from other people.

4 As councillors, you are elected to be fair and unbiased in your work and decision making. In a public meeting, and outside of it where residents may believe that you are acting as a councillor, you should be objective and prudent in what you say and the way you behave.

This means working with an open mind (to avoid any predetermination). It is never right to use the platform of a public council meeting to criticise other people or make comparisons between one person and another.

5 Residents who attend public meetings won't know about the rules we work to. The Chairman and the Clerk are responsible for explaining to them what will happen in the meeting and how they can take part. Where you may have been advising residents in anything that impacts on the council's business, you have an important role to play by declaring this ideally before the meeting to the Clerk or Chairman or at the start of the meeting, thus preparing them on how the meeting will be managed.

More so, we have to make decisions about things where there are no strict rules. The chairman will want us to be able to discuss these matters, but a public meeting is not the place for personal arguments or personal criticism. In the same way, when an issue has been raised and discussed, councillors should avoid repeating and revisiting the same topic.

6 So please, I'm asking that you prepare for our meetings by reading the reports you are sent. If you need them in a different format (larger print or on paper) let the Clerk know, and he will help you.

Tell me or the Clark if you're unable to attend. If you have to send your apologies, you can still comment on the agenda by email if you want to.

Talk to me beforehand if something doesn't seem right.

Please stay with what is relevant during the meetings.

Finally, everyone has a part to play in the way we manage and support each other in our public meetings.

16 Feb 2017