

Guidance Note: Recording Public Questions in Parish Council Minutes

Purpose of This Document

This guidance explains how public questions and comments should be recorded in parish council minutes, based on current best-practice advice and national guidance. It aims to ensure consistency, transparency and legal compliance across all meetings.

1. Legal and Practical Purpose of Minutes

Minutes are not verbatim transcripts. Their core purpose is to provide a clear, accurate and concise record of decisions made and business transacted at the meeting.

National guidance confirms that:

- *“The main purpose of the minutes is to record the resolutions made at the meeting.”*
- The precise *form* of minutes is for each council to determine and there is no requirement that they be word-for-word accounts.

Accordingly, minutes should focus on outcomes, not detailed dialogue.

2. How Public Participation Should Be Recorded

Public participation is an important part of engaging with residents, but the record included in the minutes should be **brief and factual**.

Guidance states:

- *“A brief record of topics raised at public participation will be included in the minutes of that meeting.”*

This means:

- You **do not** need to capture the exact wording of any question.
 - You **should** record only the **topic or issue raised** and any action the council agreed to take.
 - The minutes must remain **neutral, non-emotive, concise and factual**.
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3. Summarising vs. Verbatim Text

Councils are **not required** to provide verbatim minutes of public questions.

They may create **summaries** or **slightly expanded explanations** where helpful for clarity, provided they:

- Remain accurate
- Reflect the essence of what was said
- Do not add opinions or interpretation
- Do not change meaning

This approach is supported by general governance guidance, which confirms that minutes are summaries designed to be understood even years later.

4. Rights and Limitations of Public Contributions

Members of the public **cannot dictate how their comments are minuted**. Guidance states:

- *“Members of the public do not have a right... to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes.”*

They may speak only within the rules set by the council and chair and the minutes should reflect **only** the relevant topic raised—not dialogue, debate, or personal commentary.

5. Summary

In line with national guidance:

- Parish council minutes **do not need** verbatim records of public questions.
- A **brief, factual summary** of issues raised is sufficient and recommended.
- Councils may expand slightly for clarity, as long as they remain accurate and neutral.
- The public **cannot dictate** how their contribution is recorded.

This approach ensures minutes remain clear, professional, lawful and fit for long-term reference.