

Constitution and Governance Committee

Tuesday 14 February 2023

10.00 am Luttrell Room - County Hall,
Taunton



SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA

To: The Members of the Constitution and Governance Committee

We are now able to enclose the following information which was unavailable when the agenda was published:

Item 4	Public Question Time – additional information / submission The Chair will allow members of the public to ask a question or make a statement about any matter on the agenda for this meeting. These questions may be taken during the meeting, when the relevant agenda item is considered, at the Chair's discretion.
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Democratic Service Team, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY

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CPRE Somerset Speaking Notes - SCC Constitution and Governance Committee - 14.2.23

I am Fletcher Robinson, Trustee and Planner for CPRE Somerset.

At the 30 January meeting we urged the committee to drop the proposed shared three minute speaking arrangements for members of the public. This contentious issue risks turning into an 'own goal' for the new Council.

However, the revised draft retains the same arrangements.

The agenda papers contain a helpful Table comparing current public speaking arrangements across five local authorities in Somerset.

According to the Table, Somerset West and Taunton is top of the league for democratic practices with no limit on the number of speakers and each allowed to speak for three minutes.

Next comes Somerset County Council, which allows 30 minutes in total, with three minutes for each speaker.

Then comes SSDC, which allows 15 minutes in total, with 3 minutes for each speaker.

Bringing up the rear are Sedgemoor which allows just one member of the public to speak against, and Mendip, which the Table says has a shared three minute speaking arrangement.

If you look at the Constitution of each of those five authorities, in the case of the first three, the public speaking rules at committee correspond to what is laid down in the Constitution.

But in the case of Sedgemoor, even though its Constitution apparently allows five speakers to speak for three minutes, in practice only one speaker 'against' is allowed at planning committee.

We made a formal complaint to Sedgemoor last year after the second time we were barred from speaking. It turns out that its 2006 Statement of Community Involvement has a sentence limiting speakers 'against' at planning committee to just one, and this is deemed to take precedence over the Constitution.

And in Mendip, the Constitution allows each speaker 3 minutes. But another Constitutional provision allows for different committees to have different rules. The result has been shared speaking times.

In conclusion- please adopt one of the three more democratic speaking arrangements in the County - those of Somerset West and Taunton, or of your own council, or of SSDC.

And please set them out clearly in the new Somerset Council Constitution.

FR/ 12.2.23

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