

# **GENERAL SYNOD**

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## **NOVEMBER GROUP OF SESSIONS 2023**

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### **FIFTH NOTICE PAPER**

#### **CONDUCT OF MEMBERS AND RELATED STANDING ORDERS AT SYNOD**

The General Synod Members' Code of Conduct sets out the expected behaviour of members and can be found [here](#).

Members' attention is particularly drawn to a number of key points:

- Members should not use abusive or insulting language, or make personal remarks about other members.
- Members should use the same level of consideration when commenting on social media about Synod business, members or their speeches.

The National Church Institutions (NCIs) have a legal duty of care to protect their staff from bullying and other unacceptable behaviour. There is a zero-tolerance approach to abusive language aimed at any member of staff, this includes the staff and contractors of the Corporation of Church House. Please be aware that security staff are instructed to challenge anyone not visibly wearing their Synod pass; this is an essential security measure, and members are expected to respond courteously to any such challenge.

Members can expect the same level of respect from staff. If this does not happen, members are advised to contact Clerk or Chair of the Business Committee for this to be addressed.

In addition, the [Standing Orders](#) set out expectations of members in relation to the Chairs of debates. SO 15(2) states that:

*“The Chair must give a final determination on any question of order, business or procedure and on any matter that is incidental to it; accordingly, the Chair’s determination on such a matter is not open to debate or question.”*

Any member questioning or attempting to open debate on a Chair’s decision will be in breach of this Standing Order, and will be told to stop speaking.

SO 18 sets out that a breach of order is:

- (a) failure to address the Chair,*
- (b) irrelevance,*
- (c) tedious repetition, either of the member’s own arguments or of arguments already well-rehearsed by other members,*
- (d) unbecoming language,*
- (e) disregard of the authority of the Chair, or*
- (f) any other breach of order.*

Attention is also drawn to the following Standing Orders which address behaviour in the Chamber.

## **DECORUM DURING DEBATES**

There are a number of customs and practices to which members are expected to adhere. Standing Order 46 sets out the expected decorum during Synod:

### **46. Decorum**

- (1) On the entrance of the Chair into the hall at the commencement of the sitting, the members and officers*

*present must, if able to do so, rise and remain standing until the Chair has taken the chair.*

*(2) When the Chair addresses the Synod, every member and officer must sit down.*

*(3) Every member who speaks must, if able to stand, speak while standing and must address himself or herself to the Chair; and the member must resume his or her seat—*

*(a) immediately after the end of the speech, or*

*(b) before the end of the speech if addressed by the Chair or interrupted by another member raising a point of order or making a point of personal explanation in accordance with SO 19.*

*(4) No member may speak from an aisle or gangway or from the gallery of the hall.*

It is also customary to acknowledge the Chair with a nod of the head if entering or exiting the Chamber whilst Synod is sitting. Members are expected to find a suitable moment to enter or leave, to find a seat quickly and cause minimal disruption to other members.

During a vote, members should ensure that they are not sitting in the non-voting areas as their vote will not be counted, particularly on a show of hands.

When the voting results are announced, it is expected that they will be received in silence. This applies to votes on motions, amendments and matters of procedure.

### **Points of order and points of personal explanation**

There are only two reasons that a member may interrupt a speech. The first is a point of order. Standing Order 19(1) provides—

*A member may raise a point of order under the Constitution or these Standing Orders and may interrupt another speaker in order to do so subject to SO 30(3) (special procedural motions) and SO 150(4) (motion to clear public gallery etc.); when raising a point of order, a member must quote the relevant provision of the Constitution or these Standing Orders and make his or her point succinctly.*

A point of order means a query as to whether the correct procedure (as set out in the Constitution or Standing Orders) is being followed. It is not an opportunity to intervene in a debate or otherwise to disagree with what another member has said, or to seek clarification or advice. So, for example, a member could raise a point of order if another member just called to speak had already spoken in the same debate if none of the exceptions in SO 21(2)-(8) applies. But seeking to question something stated by a member in their speech is not a point of order.

If a member wishes to interrupt a debate to raise a point of order, they must stand in their place (or if unable to stand, otherwise indicate) and call “point of order”. Once called by the Chair, the member should move directly to a lectern or microphone, and immediately state what the point of order is by reference to the relevant provision of the Constitution or the Standing Orders. The Chair will then indicate whether they accept that the matter raised by the member is a point of order and, if it is, what the Chair intends to do in response. If the Chair determines that the matter raised is not a point of order, the member is deemed to have made a speech on the question under consideration, and may not speak again in the debate unless they obtain the permission of the Chair and the general consent of Synod (SO 19(4) and 21(3)).

The only other reason to interrupt a speech is under Standing Order 19(2):

*If a member wishes to correct an important misunderstanding of fact, concerning either the member or what the member has said, the member may interrupt a speech to make a point of personal explanation; but the member may do so only with the consent of the person speaking and the permission of the Chair.*

The procedure is the same as for a point of order, but calling “point of explanation”. Again, if the Chair determines that it is not a point of personal explanation, the member may not speak again in the debate without permission.

### **Special procedural motions**

There are a number of motions which are open to a member to move during the course of a debate.

These are known as “special procedural motions” and include the motion for the closure, the motion for next business and the motion for the adjournment of debate. See SOs 30 to 35. If a member is considering whether to move a special procedural motion, they should contact the Clerk who can give more detailed advice.

A member who wishes to move a special procedural motion must not interrupt another member’s speech but must wait until the member has finished speaking before doing so. As for a point of order, the member should stand in their place (or if unable to stand, otherwise indicate) and call to seek the Chair’s attention (it is sufficient to just call “Chair”; then, once the Chair’s eye is caught, “special motion”. In practice, members often call “point of order” for a special motion, which is inaccurate but serves the purpose. Once called by the Chair, the member should quickly move to the nearest microphone

and state what motion they wish to put. The Chair will then explain that specific Special Procedural Motion to the Synod before inviting the member to speak to the motion.

A member who has already spoken in a debate is not allowed to move a special procedural motion during that debate (SO 30(2)).