Hot tips for chairing Council meetings by Paul Wynne, Frome Council Town Clerk

At the beginning....

1. Welcome to all and introduce yourself and then Cllrs by asking them to raise their orange sheets.
2. No fire alarm test is planned, so if it sounds, exit the Council Chamber through the fire exit door in the corner and congregate in the far corner of the car park.
3. The toilets are either at the end of the corridor through the double doors behind you or there's another, more accessible toilet. Turn right out the double doors and through the door next to the lift
4. Anyone is welcome to speak at this meeting; indeed, you are encouraged. If your point relates to a specific agenda item you are welcome to wait until then to make it. Otherwise there's a slot on the agenda for general comments.
5. Except when we decide to have a presentation before the formal meeting begins (we did with the presentation from Longleat last time), the first item is apologies, declaration of interest and minutes of the last meeting. Cllrs should not be prompted to declare an interest as it is their responsibility to do so.
6. Ask if there are: any questions on the minutes and whether we want to update the meeting on anything. Someone might suggest that there is a mistake and if so, I will make a handwritten alteration that you will initial. You will then ask if there is a proposer and a seconder for the minutes and you will sign and date them. Usually, just be seen to sign the first page and we'll sort the rest out, later.

Normally, we have three types of agenda item:

1. For information/update – these don't need to be proposed/seconded/voted on. There will usually be a short presentation followed by any questions.
2. For decision – which do need voting on. There will usually be a short presentation followed by any questions. There will always be a recommendation in the report. A Cllr might propose to alter or add another recommendation. As we are informal, I will read out the amendment and if everyone is happy, the revised or additional recommendation will be voted on. If things get a bit nasty, technically, someone should propose an alteration which is then seconded and then voted on. And then the revised recommendation voted on. But we've not had one of those for a few years.
3. For discussion – these are usually introduced by a presentation of some sort. Eg The green infrastructure discussion on Wednesday will be introduced by Chris and Jane. The discussion format could be just a question and answer session or it could be more structured with tables reporting back. You and I will decide on a case by case basis in advance of the meeting. Timekeeping is important during discussions.

Chairing the meetings

Sometimes this can be challenging. People can be rude or abusive or just won't stop talking. It's important that you assert your authority in these instances. You can ask someone to sit down/thank them for their comment. If they still refuse to stop you can tell them that they will be asked to leave if they don't stop. If they still go on, you can ask me (as the Clerk) to escort them out of the room. People may then return if they have calmed down or leave. *This has never happened but it's wise to be prepared.*

As you know, we tend to adopt a light touch to managing FTC meetings. Points of order, accusations of a decision that has been made is ultra virus, motions being tabled, are all covered in the Standing Orders and, again, *we've never needed to turn to them*. It is perfectly fine for you to ask me for advice during the meeting and I will always try and pre-empt this by whispering in your ear or scribbling on the paper in front of us.

I will always try to see who would like to ask a question and scribble their name down for you.

You can decide to have a break in the meeting if you think it's needed. This can be useful to calm people down, or when we've had a particularly heavy/long discussion.

That's it really, have a flick through the revised Standing Orders and just ask if there's anything you're unsure about.