

Protocol on Attendance and Recording of Council Meetings.

1. Introduction

1.1 Members of the public have the right to attend all public meetings of the Council. However, those attending meetings need to recognise that it is a meeting of the Council held in public and it is not a public meeting.

1.2 Whilst members of the public are able to speak, they need to notify in advance and they will be provided with the opportunity to address the members on an item on the agenda. Although meetings are held in public, in certain circumstances when documents contain confidential or exempt information in accordance with the Local Government Act members of the public will be asked to leave the room when those items are being discussed.

1.3 The Council's Monitoring Officer is legally responsible for keeping records of decisions and ensuring public access to information. A member of her team will be in attendance at meetings of the Council to provide advice and guidance in accordance with the regulations and the Council's Constitution.

1.4 The Government's 'Openness of Local Bodies Regulations' (the 2014 Regulations) were published in August 2014 and afford members of the public the rights to report on proceedings via online media, for example blogs, twitter and other social networking sites and local news forums. The Regulations are supported by a Department for Communities and Local Government Plain English guide.

2. Responsibilities of the Council

2.1. The Council will provide reasonable facilities for those wishing to report on proceedings. The Council currently provides the following facilities:

- Free public WiFi in the Council Chamber and Committee rooms;
- Free access to public agendas, meeting and councillor information, minutes, decision details, elections information and more on the Council's web pages;
- Reasonable assistance in providing adequate space for recording to take place;
- Where meeting rooms are equipped with a hearing loop system. Members, Officers and members of the public who are hard of hearing can benefit from using the system.

2.2 The Council will also provide webcasting and recording of some key meetings to enable the public to view the meetings from their homes.

2.3 The Council is better able to provide the public with facilities to support recording and has a duty to provide facilities when it is aware that a member of the public is intending to record a meeting. It is therefore recommended that prior notice is provided of recording to enable facilities to be provided.

3. Responsibilities of the public

3.1 By attending a public meeting of the Council, Executive Board or any committee or subcommittee, you are agreeing to these guidelines as a whole and in particular the stipulations listed below:

- Members of the public are not able to address the meeting from the audience and shouting out during a meeting is not permitted;
- The Chairman will ask that members of the public who disrupt the meeting through protest; shouting out or other unacceptable behaviour not to do so. If they continue to do so after they have been warned they will be asked to leave;
- The Council reserves the right to remove the right to attend any further Council meetings, to any person who has disrupted previous meetings or whose conduct breaches any law particularly those relating to respect for others particularly in relation to diversity and inclusion;

- In cases where members of the public are suspended they will be notified of the reasons in writing; informed of the period of the suspension and the suspension will be subject to review;
- Recording of meetings should not delay or disturb the conduct of the meeting;
- The Chair of the meeting will ensure that the meeting runs in an effective manner and has the power to ensure that the meeting is not disturbed through the use of flash photography, intrusive camera equipment or the person recording the meeting moving around the room;
- Recording equipment must be of a reasonable size and nature in order to be accommodated within the room provided for the meeting without obscuring the view of attendees, including members of the public. There should be no trailing cables or any equipment which could impact on the Health and Safety of attendees;
- The recording equipment or mobile telephony must not interrupt proceedings and digital equipment must be set to 'silent' mode.

4. Objections to Recordings

4.1 A note is included on the agenda informing members of the public that the proceedings may be recorded. Information is also displayed outside of the meeting explaining the rights to film. However:

- The chair has the discretion to terminate or suspend the recording or photographing or filming if, in the opinion of the chair, its continuation would prejudice the proceedings of the meeting;
- Recording of meetings should seek where possible to avoid filming those who are not directly involved in the meeting i.e. members of the Public who have come to observe the meeting;
- Any children or vulnerable adults who have attended to present to a meeting should not be filmed without the relevant consent;
- Any elected Member who is concerned about any audio recording should raise their concerns with the Monitoring Officer or in their absence, a member of the Democratic Services team;
- At the start of each meeting to be recorded, an announcement will be made to the effect that the meeting is being or may be recorded, and that the Chairman may also terminate or suspend the recording of the meeting, in accordance with this protocol;
- It is essential that everyone present remembers to switch on their microphone when speaking;

4.2 The circumstances, in which termination or suspension might occur, could include:

- Public disturbance or suspension of the meeting (including any oral reporting or oral commentary as the meeting takes place);
- Exclusion of public and press being moved and supported;
- The chair, on advice of the monitoring officer or their representative, considering that continued recording/photography/filming/web casting might infringe the rights of any individual;
- The chair, on advice of the monitoring officer or their representative, considering that a defamatory statement has been made, or is likely to be made.

4.3 Filming and recording is only permitted in the 'open' session of the meeting.