

PROTOCOL ON THE USE OF MEDIA TOOLS AT MEETINGS HELD IN PUBLIC

1. Introduction

The purpose of this protocol is to provide guidance on the use of media tools by members of the public or representatives of the media at meetings of Council, committees and sub-committees. This includes filming, audio recording, taking photographs, blogging, tweeting and using other social media websites.

2. Background

As part of the Government's transparency drive to give citizens the opportunity to access and experience their local democracy using modern communication methods, Councils are required to give any member of the public, including community 'hyper-local' bloggers and on-line broadcasters, the same routine access to council meetings as traditional accredited media. The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 allow any member of the public to take photographs, film or audio-record the proceedings at meetings held in public, and to report on them using social media.

3. General Principle

The use of media tools is recognised as contributing towards transparency and democratic debate and there will be no restrictions on their use by members of the public during any Council meetings which the press and public are entitled to attend. However, the proceedings of a meeting must not be disrupted by the use of media tools and must not inhibit community involvement in the proceedings. The Chairman of the meeting has the right to ask someone to stop using media tools if they are causing a disruption.

4. Filming and Audio Recording

4.1 Filming and audio recording of meetings, by representatives of the media and also by members of the public using small media tools, is permitted. Although it is not a requirement, anyone wishing to film or audio record a meeting is requested to inform the Audit and Governance Manager in advance of the meeting. If the equipment to be used is larger than a hand held device, this advance notice should include details of the equipment to be used so that adequate arrangements can be made.

4.2 Any filming or audio recording must take place from fixed positions in the meeting room, generally the area designated as the public gallery. Any alternative location, due to the size of the equipment to be used, will be agreed with the Chairman of the meeting in liaison with the Manager of Marketing and Communications and the Audit and Governance Manager or their representative.

4.3 Large equipment must be set up before the meeting starts.

- 4.4 The continued use of flash photography or additional lighting will only be permitted if, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, it does not disrupt the proceedings of the meeting
- 4.5 Anyone filming a meeting should fix the device on the committee and not pan around the room to film the public gallery as members of the public have the right not to be filmed against their wishes.
- 4.6 If a member of the public addresses a meeting that is being filmed or audio recorded, such as objectors to planning or licence applications, they will be asked if they permit to being filmed or audio recorded. If they do not, the operator will be asked to stop whilst the member of the public is speaking.
- 4.7 If the Chairman considers that the filming or audio recording is disrupting the meeting in any way, the operator will be required to stop immediately. Examples of disruption include moving outside the designated area; excessive noise; intrusive lighting; a running commentary by the operator or other interruptions; and continuing to film or record when a member of the public addressing the meeting has asked not to be filmed or audio recorded.
- 4.8 If members of the public and press are asked to leave a meeting because there are private items of business on the agenda, they must not leave filming or recording devices in the meeting room.
- 4.9 Any film or audio recording must not be edited in such a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes refraining from editing the views being expressed in a way that may ridicule or show a lack of respect towards those present at the meeting. If such editing is carried out, the Council reserves the right to prevent the operator from filming or audio recording Council meetings for a period of time it considers appropriate. It may also take legal action against the operator if it considers that an offence (such as defamation) has been committed.

5. Other use of Media Tools

- 5.1 No restrictions will be placed on anyone in the public gallery at a meeting in relation to the use of twitter, blogs, facebook and still photography, provided that the Chairman does not consider their actions are disrupting the proceedings of the meeting.
- 5.2 At the start of the meeting the Chairman will request that all mobile phones are set to 'silent' to ensure that the meeting is not disrupted.
- 5.3 The Council may take legal action against anyone that it considers may be guilty of defamation as a result for their use of social media.