

POLICY on the Reporting of Council Meetings

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy seeks to provide guidance and support to the public, Civic Mayor, councillors, officers and journalists with regards to the reporting of Council meetings.
- 1.2 The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 (“the Regulations”) came into force in August 2014.
- 1.3 The Regulations form part of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (“the Act”) and their principal objective is to make local government decision making more accessible and transparent to the public. The Regulations thus seek to ensure that members of public are able to report on meetings of local government bodies.
- 1.4 The Regulations allow the public greater rights to report at open meetings of local government bodies by filming, photographing, audio recording or any other means, such as blogging, tweeting and the like.
- 1.5 The Department for Communities and Local Government (“DCLG”) has prepared a guide (see Appendix 1) to the Regulations which covers all aspects of access to information and meetings.
- 1.6 The guide makes it clear that Local Authorities are required to provide reasonable facilities to enable reporting. They are advised to use their common sense to determine the meaning and effect of the Regulations.

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1.7 This Policy shall be interpreted having regard to the DCLG guide (and/or any other prevailing guidance provided).

2. Council's Commitment

2.1 The Council is committed to openness and transparency in its decision making.

2.2 Anyone wishing to report/record Council meetings/proceedings is welcome to do so, unless otherwise excluded as permitted by law.

2.3 Any reporting/recording of Council meetings/proceedings must be in accordance with the law and this Policy.

3. Meaning of "reporting"

3.1 Reporting of Council meetings means:

- undertaking filming, photography or making an audio recording of the proceedings of the meeting;
- using any other means for enabling a person not present to see and/or hear proceedings at a meeting as it takes place or later; or
- reporting or providing commentary on proceedings at a meeting, orally or in writing, so that the report or commentary is available as the meeting takes place or later if the person is not present.
- BUT reporting does not include oral reporting or commentary at a meeting if the person reporting or providing the commentary is present at the meeting.

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- Any person who attends a meeting for the purpose of reporting on the meeting may use any communication method, including the internet, to publish, post or otherwise share the results of the person's reporting activities.

4. Obligations upon those reporting on Council meetings

4.1 Anyone reporting on a meeting of the Council must:

- do so with courtesy and respect for others in attendance;
- undertake all reporting overtly;
- not film, photograph or otherwise capture the image or face of a person who has raised concern over their rights being infringed by the reporting (or any associated activity). In such circumstances, those seeking to report the meeting should seek advice from the Chairperson (who shall be advised by the legal (or other relevant) officer in attendance);
- not film, photograph or otherwise capture the image, body or face of a minor (who shall for the purposes of this Policy be defined as anyone under the age of 18 years) unless express permission has been obtained from the parent(s), guardian(s), carer(s) or person(s) with legal responsibility for that child(ren);
- not film or photograph a vulnerable person who has objected to being filmed or photographed.
- not edit or otherwise interfere with any filming, photography or recording of a meeting in such a way that could lead to misrepresentation,

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misinterpretation, unjust/unfair reputational harm to another or the infringement of the spirit of the Act, the Regulations and/or this Policy;

- subject to the above, focus any filming and photography (or any other such recording) on councillors, officers, invitees and members of the public who are directly involved in the conduct of the meeting.
- carry out reporting without causing any distraction, interference and/or other adverse or unreasonable impact on the meeting or to anyone else in attendance;
- not use flash photography or additional lighting (unless agreed in advance and there is no adverse impact upon the meeting in question); and
- keep any devices used for recording on their 'silent' setting throughout the meeting.

5. Council's Obligations

5.1 The Council:

- will ensure reasonable provision is made for anyone reporting on a meeting of the Council, such as provide adequate space and seating to view, hear and record the meeting;
- the Chairperson of a meeting has in his/her discretion the right to designate a specific area within the meeting room for purposes of filming and photography;

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- agrees that the Chairperson shall exercise discretion and judgement to balance the rights of those entitled to report on a meeting pursuant to the Act, the Regulations and DCLG Guide against any other applicable legal rights, duties, obligations and other considerations arising;
- where there is a dispute/tension with regards to the provisions and application of this Policy, the Act, the Regulations and/or the DCLG Guide, the Chairperson shall resolve the dispute/tension as the Chairperson sees fit; and for the purposes of the meeting in question, his/her decision shall be final.

March 2015