

## **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 at meetings of Council, Cabinet, committees and sub-committees. This includes filming, audio recording, taking photographs, blogging, tweeting and using other social media websites.

### **2. Background**

In February 2011, the Government urged councils to embrace its transparency drive and give citizens the opportunity to access and experience their local democracy using modern communication methods. It called for credible community 'hyper-local' bloggers and on-line broadcasters to get the same routine access to council meetings as traditional accredited media.

### **3. General Principle**

The use of media tools, in certain circumstances, is recognised as contributing towards transparency and democratic debate and there will be a general presumption in favour of allowing their use. 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.

### **4. Filming and Audio Recording**

4.1 Filming and audio recording of meetings, normally by representatives of the media but also by members of the public using small media tools, shall generally be permitted provided that a request is submitted to the Democratic Services Manager no later than 5.00pm two working days before the meeting at [committeeservices@horsham.gov.uk](mailto:committeeservices@horsham.gov.uk) (for example, the deadline for requests for a Tuesday meeting would be 5.00 pm on the preceding Thursday). Such requests shall include:

4.1.1 The name, organisation and contact details of the person making the request.

4.1.2 What equipment will be used.

4.1.3 What the film or audio recording will be used for.

4.1.4 When the person wishes to film or record during the meeting.

4.2 Meetings which take the form of hearings, on licensing matters for example, may not always be suitable for filming or audio recording due to the nature of

some evidence to be given at the hearing. It will be at the Chairman's discretion to determine whether filming or audio recording will be permitted at each hearing.

- 4.3 On receipt of a request to film or audio record a meeting, the Democratic Services Manager will liaise with the Chairman of the meeting, or in their absence the Vice-Chairman, before determining whether the request accords with the general principle set out in 3 above.
- 4.4 Any filming or audio recording must take place from fixed positions in the meeting room agreed with the Chairman of the meeting, in liaison with the Communications Manager and the Democratic Services Manager or their representative.
- 4.5 Equipment must be set up before the meeting starts.
- 4.6 The use of flash photography or additional lighting will only be permitted for a limited period during the meeting at a point in the proceedings agreed with the Chairman in liaison with the Communications Manager or their representative. This will be communicated to relevant parties.
- 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.
- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 Media organisations will be required to supply the Council with a copy of all film or audio recording made at a meeting within a reasonable period.
- 4.10 The requirements and obligations contained within, and arising from this protocol will be provided to the member of the public or media organisation when permission to film has been granted, and will state that permission is only granted on the understanding that they will be adhered to.

## **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 (without flash), provided that the Chairman does not consider their actions are disrupting the proceedings of the meeting.
- 5.3 Meetings which take the form of hearings, on licensing matters for example, may not always be suitable for photography due to the nature of some evidence to be given at the hearing. It will be at the Chairman's discretion to determine whether photography will be permitted at each hearing.

## **6. Members and officers of the Council**

- 6.1 Members, as participants, are in a different position to members of the public and their actions affect the reputation of the Council. Members have an obligation to pay close attention to the proceedings of the meetings they attend and to demonstrate that they are playing an active part. Therefore, Members should not as a general rule engage in the use of social media during meetings of Council, Cabinet, committees and sub-committees.
- 6.2 The use of media tools by officers is only permitted if it is in the normal course of their work.
- 6.3 The use of social media tools is not permitted when a meeting is in exempt session.

## **7. At the meeting**

- 7.1 At the start of the meeting the Chairman will advise all persons present if filming or recording has been allowed and will request that all mobile phones are set to 'silent' to ensure that the meeting is not disrupted.
- 7.2 Visitors to a meeting, including persons registered to speak at the meeting, other interested parties, Parish Council representatives and representatives and officers of outside agencies who have been specifically invited to address the meeting may, at this point, elect not to be filmed, recorded or photographed.
- 7.3 There is a presumption that the Council's own participants in a meeting, being either serving Councillors or officers employed by the Council, consent to being filmed, recorded or photographed at those meetings where such activities have been permitted by the Chairman.
- 7.4 If the Chairman has not agreed that filming, recording or photographing can take place during a particular meeting then a notice will be displayed to this effect.
- 7.5 The operator(s) of the filming, recording or photographic equipment must comply with the wishes of the persons detailed in point 7.2 above. Where there is a failure to do so, the Chairman may decide to stop the proceedings and seek the removal of such equipment from the meeting room.

**Undertaking by representative of the media/member of the public in relation to the filming and audio recording of a meeting**

'I confirm that in attending the Meeting of the \_\_\_\_\_ to be held on \_\_\_\_\_ I will comply with the terms of the Horsham District Council's protocol on the use of media tools at meetings held in public.

I confirm that I will direct anyone who is acting under my authority, who is also attending that meeting, to comply with this protocol.

I undertake that any visual and/or sound recordings made shall not be published in a manner, (whether in whole or by way of an extract), that is designed to mislead the public as to the true essence of any statements (verbally made or otherwise) that were recorded and in that regard, any extract published will be of sufficient duration so as to avoid any misleading impression being made.

I shall ensure that anyone acting under my authority shall comply with this requirement and that if the recordings are passed to a third party that that third party shall also comply with this requirement.'

Sign / Date

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