

## **SECTION 14 - OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014**

### **1. FILMING, VIDEOING, PHOTOGRAPHY AND AUDIO RECORDING AT COUNCIL MEETINGS**

- 1.1 This legislation provides the press and public the right to film and digitally report from all public meetings of local government bodies.
- 1.2 It should be noted that the legislation also covers Parish Councils and Parish Meetings. The press and public will be allowed to use modern technology and communication methods such as filming, audio-recording, blogging and tweeting to report the proceedings of the meetings of councils and other local government bodies.
- 1.3 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council supports the principles of openness and transparency. It allows filming, recording and taking photographs at its meetings that are open to the public. It also allows the use of social networking websites (such as Twitter and Facebook) and blogging to communicate with people about what is happening, as it happens.
- 1.4 This protocol provides guidance on acceptable conduct for filming, recording and photographing and the use of traditional and social media tools.

### **2. FILMING, RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHY**

- 2.1 As a courtesy and in order to ensure that provision is made to accommodate the public and press who wish to film, record or photograph at meetings, the Council requests, where possible, notice of the intention a minimum of two working days in advance. The Governance Services Manager or Senior Democratic Services Officer should be made aware of the intention to film, record or photograph and they will in turn notify the Chairman of the meeting of what is to take place.
- 2.2 Those intending to bring large equipment or wishing to discuss any special requirements are advised to contact the Council's Communications and Engagement Team in advance of the meeting to seek advice and guidance.
- 2.3 All recording devices, mobile devices and other equipment must be set on silent mode during the course of the meeting.
- 2.4 In order to keep disruption to a minimum, there will be an area of the meeting room set aside for press or public who wish to film, record or photograph a meeting. Filming, recording or photography will only be allowed from this area.
- 2.5 Where the Council has been notified of the intention to film, record or photograph in a meeting, the Chairman will, at the beginning of the relevant meeting, make an announcement that the meeting will be filmed, recorded or photographed and will ask if anyone objects to this.
- 2.6 The Council understands that some members of the public attending its meetings may not wish to be recorded whilst using their right to speak during the

public question session or when speaking about a planning or licensing application. The Chairman of the meeting will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any request not to be recorded is complied with. The Chairman has the final say in this matter.

- 2.7 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 those activities have been agreed.
- 2.8 It should be noted that the Chairman of a meeting will have absolute discretion to terminate or suspend any of the above activities if, in their opinion, continuing to allow it would prejudice the running of the meeting. Circumstances in which termination or suspension might occur could include:
  - Public disturbance, disruption or suspension of the meeting;
  - The meeting agreeing to formally exclude the press and public from the meeting due to the exempt/confidential nature of the business being discussed, in accordance with statutory procedures; and
  - For any other reason which the Chairman considers reasonable in the circumstances.
- 2.9 The use of additional lighting will not be allowed unless this has been discussed in advance of the meeting and agreement reached on how it can be done without disrupting proceedings. Flash photography will not be allowed.
- 2.10 Filming, Recording and Photography will not be allowed for any meeting or part of a meeting where the press and public are excluded. The Chairman will announce that Filming, Recording and Photography must cease when the announcement to exclude the press and public is made.
- 2.11 Filming, Recording and Photography must cease immediately once the Chairman announces that the meeting is at an end.
- 2.12 Anyone who makes a full or partial recording of a meeting must respect the law, including the Human Rights and Data Protection legislation and intellectual property rights. They will be responsible for any allegations of breaches of the law which may result from their use of recorded material and are admitted to the meeting room on the basis that they accept that responsibility.
- 2.13 Anyone who makes a full or partial recording of a meeting must agree that audio/visual recordings and photographs will not be edited in such a way that could lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings. This includes refraining from editing the views being expressed in a way that might ridicule or show lack of respect towards those being filmed, recorded or photographed.
- 2.14 Councillors who have concerns that the protocol is not being adhered to in any way should discuss these concerns with the Monitoring Officer in the first instance. Where possible and applicable, Councillors will have the support of the Council should they be considering any individual action.
- 2.15 Members must not film, record or photograph any meeting, when they are

participating in that meeting.

- 2.16 Minutes of meetings will be prepared and signed by the Chairman at the next meeting of the Committee and will remain the Council's official record of the meeting. Filming, recording or photography at meetings will not impact on the status of minutes being the true and accurate reflection of the discussions and decisions made.

### **3. SOCIAL MEDIA**

- 3.1 No restrictions will be placed on those attending meetings who wish to use blogs, Twitter, Facebook or other media, provided that their actions do not affect the conduct of the meeting.
- 3.2 Councillors, as participants in the meeting, have an obligation to pay close attention to the proceedings and therefore during the course of a meeting they should not engage in the use of social media. If Councillors are not taking part in the meeting, they can use social media.
- 3.3 The use of social media tools will not be permitted in a meeting where the press and public are excluded.