

Part 5 - Guidance: Use of Audio and Video Recording, Photography and Social Media during Council Meetings

As a publicly funded organisation, accountable to the residents it serves; Shropshire Council wants to be transparent in its business, operations and outcomes.

Encouraging participation in democracy is important, as part of this Shropshire Council wants residents to see decisions being made and to be able to witness local democracy in action.

To do this effectively we have issued the following guidance to support the aim of accountability, openness and transparency in the decisions we take.

Background

Public access to council meetings is covered by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985. This act sets out the requirement for council meetings to be open to the public*. The act also states that councils are not 'required to permit' the taking of photographs, or the recording of meetings for future viewing.

The overall conduct of council meetings is governed by this act and provides the council with the:

'...power of exclusion to suppress or prevent disorderly conduct or other misbehaviour at a meeting'

and whilst the council encourages the use of social media as a way of promoting transparency and supporting the democratic process it is important that there are guidelines in place to ensure that any use of technology does not interfere with the overall integrity of meetings and the decisions made.

**The Act also provides the basis for the exclusion of the public when confidential matters are being discussed.*

Guidelines

The use of social media during council meetings

Blogging and micro blogging, including twitter is encouraged during council meetings, so long as this does not distract, or disrupt the proceedings of the meeting and provides a true and accurate representation of the proceedings. Those seeking to use these services during meetings are reminded to do so discreetly and in such a way that does not interfere with the ability of those around them to follow the proceedings of the meeting.

The council will provide an official #tag for each meeting and members of the media are asked to include this in their tweets. All those seeking to use these technologies are reminded of their legal responsibilities in this area, particularly those under the 1996 Defamation Act.

Filming and Audio Recording of Council Meetings

Cabinet meetings will be video recorded by the Council and may be made available to the public via the Shropshire Council newsroom. All those attending these meetings will be informed by the Chairman, prior to the start of the meeting, that video recording is taking place and notices will also be displayed in prominent locations.

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The camera will not record or show images of those in the public gallery and, by prior notification, those members of the public who are called to speak at meetings may opt to speak from a position where they are not visually identified on camera.

The video and audio recording of Council meetings by members of the public is *permitted, on mobile devices and for personal use, so long as this is done discreetly and in such a way that does not interfere with the proceedings of the meeting or the privacy of other members of the public who may also be attending the meeting.

Videoring and audio recording for other purposes, including by the media, may be permitted, on a case by case basis, by prior agreement at the discretion of the meeting Chair. Please follow the guidance on www.shropshirenewsroom.com

These guidelines will be reviewed at regularly intervals and may be withdraw without notice. These facilities will be revoked if it is found that they are subject to abuse and other action may also be taken to protect the reputation of the council.

**subject to terms and conditions. A copy of the terms and conditions can be found on www.shropshirenewsroom.com*

The use of photography during Council meetings

Photography is permitted, with permission, at the start of a Council meeting (first 5 minutes), but is not normally permitted during Council meetings. Photography during the meeting may be permitted, on a case by case basis, and by prior agreement. Requests to take photographs at any Council meeting should be made to the Corporate Head of Legal and Democratic Services at least two working days prior to the meeting.

Agreement to grant permissions for photographs is at the discretion of the meeting Chair.

Integrity of meetings

It is the Chairman's responsibility to ensure that the use of these technologies does not interfere with the overall integrity of a meeting. Should the Chairman, for any reason, feel that the use of these technologies is interfering with the proceedings of the meeting, these facilities may be withdrawn under the powers of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.